WHEN · GRANDMAMMA WAS · FOURTEEN

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0000151301 1

MARION · HARLAND

FREDERIC AND I.

See page 273.

Mrs. Mary V. L. Fortune.

When Grandmamma Was Fourteen

By

Marion Harland

AUTHOR OF "WHEN GRANDMAMMA WAS NEW," ETC.

Illustrated by

Etheldred B. Barry

"My salad days—
When I was green in judgment."
—ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA.

Boston

Lothrop Publishing Company

PZ3
.T272
Wh

LIBRARY of CONGRESS
Two Copies Received
JUL 12 1905
Copyright Entry
May 19. 1905
CLASS a XXc. No.
117199
COPY B.

Copyright, 1905,
By Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Company.

Published August, 1905.

05-21569

Norwood Press
J. S. Cushing & Co. — Berwick & Smith Co.
Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.

To

THE FRIENDS, "FIT BUT" NOW SADLY "FEW,"

WHO KNEW GRANDMAMMA WHEN SHE
WAS FOURTEEN.

MARION HARLAND

1905

Contents

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	At the City Spring	9
II.	A Cross of Bitter Herbs	24
III.	I keep My Sorrow to Myself	45
IV.	I am put upon the Rack	67
V.	Duped again!	89
VI.	Miss Barbara Allen	112
VII.	I make a Holocaust	138
VIII.	Marion	158
IX.	The Blessèd Damozel	181
X.	Miss Marcia	198
XI.	"More Anon"	219
XII.	"The Phenomenon"	235
XIII.	My Lady Bountiful	253
XIV.	"M. P."	277
XV.	The Old Year Out	297
XVI.	My First Taste of Fame	314
XVII.	Wedding Favors	337
XVIII.	Jonah's Gourd	351
XIX.	My Convert	370
XX.	A Brave Lady	385

Illustrations

Frederic and I . . . . . *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

"Seated at the table in the summer-house" . . 128

"I was walking very slowly, my head down" . . 232

"'For *her* sake, Dick!' I sobbed" . . . 312

When Grandmamma was Fourteen

Chapter I

At The City Spring

"Standing with reluctant feet
Where the brook and river meet."

—*Longfellow.*

LONGFELLOW had not written those lines at the date of my story. If he had, I should not have entered into the fulness and breadth of their meaning. To Sidney Page they would have been rubbish not worth the hearing. If her feet were reluctant, it was because she was unwilling to stand where she was, and eager to

wade the brook until she got out of her depth. Then she would have swum as naturally as a water-bird.

She and I had walked up-town and down-town and across-town that Saturday afternoon, shopping a little and talking a great deal, strolling aimlessly from street to street, until we sat down at last upon a bench made fast to a tree close to the City Spring.

It was six o'clock by now. The sunbeams had struck almost horizontally into our faces as we descended the eastern slope from the street. The Spring itself was in shadow. It gushed from a rocky bank and fell, tinkling and spreading, into a stone basin, then ran laughingly away between the hills in a tiny, twisted ribbon of a brooklet. Eastern and western slopes were shaded by large trees, and the grass crept close to the water's edge. There was no prettier nook in *ante-bellum* Richmond — City of Gardens though it was — than the grounds about the City Spring. Old residents maintained stoutly that there was no better water in town or country.

We had pulled off our gloves and drunk from our hollowed palms as soon as we got there. Walking had made us thirsty. While we talked, Sidney pulled her gloves straight and patted them reflectively upon her lap. The gloves were pale pink, and the lap was white muslin. Her hat was of white chip, garlanded with wild roses that matched the delicate pink of the gloves. She was the adopted daughter of a rich aunt, and her clothes were the admiration of the school.

Sidney was sixteen. I was fourteen. My chosen intimates were always older than I — why I have never been able to determine. Nor did I comprehend then more clearly than now why I always loved them far better than they loved me. Before I was ten years old I took this fact for granted. At fourteen it had ceased to puzzle me. To this hour the conviction brings with it the old, familiar ache I shall never get rid of while I live — and love.

Knowing, as I could not but know, that I was Sidney's superior in natural ability and in intellectual attainments, I yet looked up to her, and,

out of lesson hours, deferred to her judgment and opinions. I helped her with her sums, albeit a poor arithmetician myself; coached her confidently in algebra, the one and only branch of mathematics I really liked; corrected the spelling and pulled into shape the ungrammatical structure of her compositions; shuddered and froze to the heart and toes at her discomfitures under the pitiless fire of M. Guillaume's sarcasms on "French days" — yet abated not one jot or tittle of my adoration.

She was handsome rather than pretty. Recalling the picture she made for my loving contemplation that May day when the sun hung low, and the young leaves of sycamore and poplars rustled silkily above our heads, and leaping spring and whispering brook kept time to the beating of light hearts, I see a slim figure, a clear skin — the clearer by contrast with dark hair and a delicate pencilling of hair on the upper lip — "the type of American girl that," Dr. Holmes says, "gives us some of our most beautiful women." The short upper lip curved saucily when she smiled, revealing perfect teeth; her nose was ever so slightly "tip-

tilted"; straight eyebrows were darkly defined upon a low forehead; her eyes were brown and lively.

Yet, in perspective, I conclude that the charms which drew and held me to her for two years were, first, her glorious voice in singing, her good humor and flow of girlish spirits, and her appreciation of my admiration and doglike devotion. She was never demonstrative, but she had confessed to me once that she was "more fond of me than of any other girl she knew." I lived upon that concentrated tabloid of sentiment for twenty months and three weeks.

Since her return to school after the Christmas holidays a glow of romance had tinged our intimacy. One night in February which she had spent with me, she confided to my tingling ears that she was "as good as engaged to Tom Garlick, who had been in love with her ever since she could recollect anything." He was twenty-five years old — quite an old bachelor — and sober, even for that mature age. But he worshipped the dust upon her shoes, and was good and steady, quite a pattern young man, and

"Aunt Parke thought the world and all of him."

Here was material in abundance for the airy mansion I proceeded to build out of hand, so much to Sidney's amusement, when I outlined it to her, that I kept the dream henceforward to myself. But I continued to build. A comely turret was supplied by a planter from the county which was Sidney's home, who dined one day with my relatives, the Mortons. My sister-cousin, Mary 'Liza, and I made our home with them during the school session. I seized an opportunity, when others were not listening, to ask the visitor if he knew Mr. Thomas Garlick. The reply was prompt and satisfactory: —

"Very well! He is one of the finest fellows going — quite the catch of the county."

The phrase jarred upon my sensibilities, but I overlooked the want of taste in one who knew no better, reminding myself that pearls are picked out of decaying oysters.

I wished that Sidney had not laughed when I repeated what the matter-of-fact planter had said.

"Everybody knows *that!*" she said. "That's the reason Aunt Parke approves of him."

I knew my dear girl too well to entertain for a second the suspicion that she shared in her aunt's sordid motives. I had no secrets from her that I could put into words, and I believed that I had seen down to the lowest depths of her pure heart.

Of course, there are things nobody can talk over with any other flesh-and-blood human creature: Tom Garlick, for example — and Mr. Frederic Sedley, the Prince Charming of my reveries.

Emerson tells us that "we are things of shreds and patches, borrowed unequally from good and bad ancestors, and a misfit from the start." Mr. Frederic Sedley was made up of sections of Edward Dunallan, Sir Charles Grandison, Ivanhoe, and William Wallace, cemented and riveted with material from minor heroes who figured in *Godey's Lady's Book* serials and sketches, and each bit was a snug fit, presenting a symmetrical whole. The name was my own invention, and the Mosaic Man kept it for years, through many and radical changes in his component parts. An attribute

was pulled out here and there, and others substituted; a grace that appealed to my childish fancy was superseded by one approved by maturer judgment. Mr. Frederic Sedley bore the same title and was, for all intents and purposes, Himself, offering a triumphant illustration of the metaphysical dogma that "the identity of a thing remains, even though it has suffered a change in some of its parts."

I pause to say, incidentally, that I owe a mighty debt of gratitude to my Ideal Hero. I had hitched my wagon to a star, and I kept the traces taut. It is rank folly for parents and teachers to warn boys and girls off the realm of Imagination inhabited by Coming Men and Waiting Women. The young will dream and aspire, with Love as the central figure of the vision, whether parents permit or prohibit. The bright chimera that sits highest upon the horizon of Youth will not down at the bidding of Reason and Experience personified by Middle Age. Frederic Sedleys, built up of worthy stuff, are safeguards against what plastic French labels as premature *passions* and awkward *affaires*. I was

immune against everyday John Smiths, Peter Browns, and Tom Garlicks. All were mean and commonplace beside the majestic serenity and imperial equipments of the Mosaic Man hidden from profane and curious eyes in a tabernacle to which I, alone, had the key. I should have blushed myself blind for shame had his name, or a hint of his existence, escaped my lips.

Perhaps it would be different when I was old enough to have a lover in tangible flesh and broadcloth. Even then there would be holy reserves from one's best bosom friend — and Sidney Page was mine.

As if she had divined the tenor of my musings, she ended an unusually long silence by saying:—

"I had a letter from Tom Garlick last week. I haven't had a chance to talk to you about it since. Oh!" — in whimsical petulance — "I *do* wish he hadn't such a ridiculous name!"

I had wished the same, a hundred times, but refrained from saying it. It cost even a perfervid imagination an effort to eliminate the onion-flavor from my romance.

"No name is odd when you are used to it,"

I protested bravely. "I'd rather be called 'Garlick' than Mudd, or Hogg, or Hogshead, or Cake, or Murdagh, or Slaughter! I know men with these names. And every one of them is a preacher! Funny — isn't it — that men with queer names so often take to the ministry? Mr. Murdagh and Mr. Slaughter have churches in the same county, too!"

"I wish to goodness Tom Garlick would study for the ministry!" with rising heat. "Then he'd have to let me alone for — let me see! three years, at least. He's been to college, so I suppose he could be turned out a parson in three years. I shall be nineteen then — quite an elderly lady. He can't expect me to wait for him until I'm old enough to put on caps!"

"My mother did not marry until she was nineteen," I ventured consolingly. "And there's Mrs. Mitchell — the prettiest bride in Richmond! She's twenty-three. Cousin Molly Belle says the time is coming when sensible girls will not think of marrying under twenty-five. She says girlhood is a *beautiful* time, and it's *fine* to have it last ten years instead of three!"

"And to be on the old-maid list for five out of the ten! No, thank you! I have no fancy for the sere and yellow leaf. But there's no hope of Tom Garlick's giving me a chance to put him off. I told him at Christmas that I wished he'd go to town and get into a fight in a faro-bank, or get roaring drunk in the street, or pick a man's pocket — or do something else disgraceful — that would give me an excuse for discarding him. He is so tiresomely good and proper that I want to shake him sometimes. When he gets down to long stories of how comfortably and peacefully and quietly we're going to live when we are married, I almost yawn my head off! And the idea of hearing myself called, 'Mrs. Garlick'! I shocked him to death one day by saying I'd as lief be 'Saleratus'!"

"He must be very good-natured and very patient, and very, very much in love, to let you say such things, and not get angry!" said I, gravely admonitory.

"Oh! he's all that, and more besides! And I'm not *any* of it! But I was telling you about his letter. I brought it along for you to read!"

She drew it from her pocket and tossed it into my lap.

I hesitated to touch it. My face flamed up hotly.

"You don't mean *that!* Nobody ought to read love-letters except the person to whom they are written. I know he wouldn't like me to see what he has said to you!"

"Then he can lump it! Read it, goosie, and you'll see it isn't a love-letter. It's just plain, everyday talk. 'Direct, and to the point,' as I've heard him say about business talks. I wouldn't blush if it was read from the top of St. Paul's Church steeple. He isn't given to sentimental speeches, and he just *can't* write them!"

Thus urged, I read the first love-letter that ever came into my hands: —

"DEAR SIDNEY: You and I have been good as engaged to be married for Four Months, and, as I have told you a good many times, I can't remember when I didn't think more of you than of any other girl I ever saw or ever expect to see.

You will be Seventeen next Fall, and I am going on Twenty-Six, and I have a good plantation, and plenty of Hands to work it, and a nice House, and all the Furniture we need, even to Silver and China and Glass and Linen. I don't sea any reason why we should not get Married just as soon as you lieve School in July. My Mother was married when she was Sixteen, and a Better Manager never lived. I have been mighty Lonely since she died last Year. A Man is always lonely with no woman in his House. I want you to come and make a Home for me.

"I broached the subject to your Aunt yesterday, and she has no Objection if you are Agreeable. She says she will go to Richmond next week and begin buying your Wedding-clothes if you say yes. She is just waiting for the word. So everything is Smooth in that Direction. She certainly was mighty kind to me, and I certainly am mighty obliged to her.

"I want to make Matters just as easy for you as I can, Sidney, and I am sure you and Me will be mighty happy together.

"Please let me hear from you soon as you can. I shall be mighty Anxshus till I do.

"Devotedly yours,

"T. L. GARLICK."

"Well?" queried Sidney, as I looked up from the big sheet blackened by the school-boyish scrawl.

She was smiling tranquilly and was far more composed than I. My cheeks burned and throbbed with the hurrying blood; my finger-tips were cold. Had I uttered what tingled on my tongue, it would have been — "I thought you said he had been through college!"

Instead, I substituted lamely, "I think he means a great deal more than he says!"

With the quickness of thought I rehearsed to myself the terms in which Mr. Frederic Sedley had couched his petition for a speedy union when I had opened the tabernacle last night after Mary 'Liza was asleep. A great wave of prideful love surged over me at the comparison.

"There's where Tom Garlick and I differ," rejoined Sidney, coolly, handing another letter to

me. "I say just exactly what I mean, and I mean to stand by what I say!"

The letter was a mere note.

"My Dear Friend: I feel it to be my duty to say to you candedly that I do not love you, and that I can never marry you. I am sorry I did not tell you the honest truth at Christmas, and that I have let you write to me as if we were engaged. If I am hurting your feelings now, I hope you will forgive me, and believe that I am now and always

"Your Friend and well-wisher,

"Sidney Bruce Page."

Chapter II

A Cross of Bitter Herbs

" If I said so, I told you a story,
For my heart is Jo Hardy's alone."

— *Mrs. Norton.*

"WELL?" said Sidney again, as I lowered the paper and looked, not at her, but at a robin that had alighted to take a shower-bath from the falling water. "What have you got to say *now?*"

In truth, I was once more biting back what I was tempted to say. The particular sentence, kept with difficulty behind my locked teeth, was: —

"You've spelled 'candidly' wrong!"

The habit of correcting her orthography had been rooted by much practice. As a family, we Burwells spelled with absolute correctness. My mother considered correct orthography an essential part of a gentlewoman's education. I had to remind myself that Tom Garlick, although a graduate of William and Mary (!), was not likely to observe this one blunder in the very ladylike epistle that was to go to him. I rallied my "company manners."

"You know your own sentiments best—" slowly, and still watching the robin, subconsciously.

It wore a bright red vest, untarnished by much sitting and brooding. It was, therefore, a male bird.

Would Sidney, wondered my subconscious self, sport white muslin, pale pink kids, and hats to match, if she settled down in the nice House that needed a mistress? The suggestion was a "bear" in the way. Garlick stock was dropping steadily. Something within me revolted as at violence done to my finer nature.

"I should think I ought to!" retorted Sidney, with virtuous firmness. "Some girls would flirt with him for weeks to come; play fast and loose just to keep themselves in practice, and then drop him at last. That isn't *my* way!"

I patted the hand that stroked the pale pink gloves she had stretched to their fullest length.

"You are too noble, too true-hearted, too just, and too merciful to be a coquette!" I said, in priggish approval. "I am very sorry for him, yet I don't see what else you can do but tell him the truth. And"—picking my words as instinct warned me I was nearing thin ice—"his letter doesn't impress me as that of a man who would suffer keenly from a disappointment of the heart. He would, I think, take it very philosophically—"

"You were never more mistaken in your life!" interposed my bosom friend, briskly. "He is *desperately* in love with me! He probably won't take 'no' for an answer the first time. I wouldn't marry a man who would! Why, I made him court me six times in ten days before I'd give him one grain of encour-

agement. He'll suffer *horribly*, of course, but that is to be expected. What I'm most afraid of is that he'll make trouble between me and Aunt Parke. She was mightily pleased when he courted me. I'm not her own child, don't you see? and the money is Uncle Parke's, not hers. And they'll both be disappointed! O dear!"

She broke off with a sob in her throat, and took out her handkerchief.

"But she cannot want you to marry a man you can never love!" I hastened to comfort her. "It would be a sin — a dreadful sin — to marry anybody unless you love him so well you cannot help it."

Sidney had dried the corner of each eye, and now stooped for a pebble to shy at the robin, who was fussily flirting the spray from his feathers — missing him, of course. Action and tone were abstracted.

"There's no use crossing a bridge before you get to it!" she philosophized dreamily. Then, with a little shake of herself, not unlike the robin's flutter, she altered her manner: —

"Suppose we talk about something more agreeable! Did you ever happen to meet Len Brooks?"

I laughed, and followed her lead cordially.

"I can't say I've met him, except in passing on the street. He's eternally on the street, you know. I've seen him a hundred times. 'Dandy Len,' people call him. He carries a shiny cane, and wears a shiny hat on the side of a shiny head, and shiny boots upon the prettiest little feet you ever saw, and a shiny ring upon the miminy-pimminist hand! All together he is a lovey-duckey man, in his own opinion."

Sidney smiled, in stooping for another pebble. This time she shied it at nothing in particular, and presumably with better aim than before.

"And what is the opinion of other people? I like to hear you talk, Molly Burwell! Nobody else amuses me as you do — you funny girl!"

Thus encouraged, I dashed on.

"Cousin Frank Morton — and other men — call him 'Monkey Brooks.' He looks just like one, you know, if you have ever seen him. He

isn't a bit handsome. He's all clothes and get-up. Miss Margaret Morton, Cousin Frank's sister, met him at a party last winter. He bored her to death, for he can't talk anything but small talk and nonsense, and he gabbles all the time. So Miss Margaret got to thinking of something else, and didn't know he had asked her a question, twice, until he said: —

"'The subject requires a quick-witted person to handle it, Miss Morton. It isn't your fault if you can't see as far into a millstone as some people.'

"With that, Miss Margaret drew herself up and looked at him as a queen might look at a mouse — or a monkey! and, said she, as smiling and as cool as could be — 'I may not be able to see through a millstone, but I can see through babbling Brooks!' Half a dozen people heard it and the story got all over town. Isn't it funny you should have mentioned his name to-day? I was thinking of that story just a minute ago. I suppose the ripple of the water put me in mind of 'babbling Brooks.' But how did you happen to speak of him?"

Sidney laid one glove upon the other, and devoted her energies to the business of measuring the two to see if they were true yoke-fellows. Her eyes were fixed upon the task; her lips tightened into a straight line, then relaxed into a mischievous smile.

"How did I happen to speak of him? I suppose because I have thought of nobody else, awake or dreaming, for three weeks past. Because he loves me and I love him, and we are going to be married as soon as we can make our arrangements. *Now* — what has Miss Molly to say?"

Nothing, — for what must have been fully two minutes, a whirling blank interval during which all was naught and naught was all. So sick and shaken was I that I could no more have moved than I could have spoken.

The first straw my drowning brain caught at was "Monkey Brooks!"

I did not know I had articulated it until I heard Sidney repeat it merrily: —

"Yes, my dear! 'Monkey Brooks,' 'Dandy Len,' 'Babbling Brooks,' or whatever envious

people choose to call him. I don't care a fig for what they say. He is the only man in the world for me. But it wasn't fair in me to spring it upon you in that way. I wanted to hear what you would say before you knew how matters stand. And I found out!"

Her relish of the joke, the clear gush of girlish laughter, and her absolute freedom from any thought of resentment, were as a dash of cold water in my face. I gasped, and thought and speech returned.

"I didn't dream that you knew him!" I said, beginning to feel nettled. "It was mean in you to let me run on about him when you —"

She finished the sentence, still good-humoredly: —

"Know him better than Mr. and Mrs. and Miss Morton, and anybody else in town, ever can! I'm not a bit mad with you, or with your friends. It's just amusing, that's all, to see how much mistaken the wiseacres can be. I never met Len Brooks until the middle of April, the time the school was closed for a week because General Nunham was sick. I stayed that week

with my mother's cousins, the Curtis Clarkes in Hanover. They happen to be a sort of kinsfolks of Len — at least Mr. Clarke is — and he happened to spend Sunday with them. It poured rain all of Sunday and Monday. You know what is bound to happen" — her face dimpling archly — "if a young fellow and a girl are shut up by the rain in a country house for two days. They will either hate one another forever afterwards, or they will fall in love. Well, we don't hate one another — *yet!*"

I had no answer ready. My brain was back at its work, and recalling more things about Len Brooks than I would have believed I knew two minutes ago. Most distinctly I recollected Cousin Frank's emphatic reply to his wife when she looked up from a list of people she was inviting to an evening party to say: —

"Ought we to ask Len Brooks, dear? Won't it seem rather marked if we always leave him out?"

"The more marked the better!" his jaw square and his eyes stern. "He is a dissolute puppy and a blackleg to boot!"

I was only fourteen, but I knew the dictionary definition of "dissolute" and "blackleg." I was also sophisticated enough to know that Sidney would sooner set Frank Morton down as a malicious liar than credit what the words signified when applied to her lover.

Her lover! Len Brooks! monkey, puppy, roué, and gambler! And Sidney was my very dearest friend!

I plucked miserably and mechanically at a clump of wild tansy growing about the roots of the tree against which I leaned; as mechanically arranged them into straight lines on my knee, wondering, all the while, what I should say — what I *could* say, and feeling as helpless as a fly clinging to the spoke of a swift wheel, afraid to let go and hardly able to hold on.

Sidney prattled on — not effusively, but with evident satisfaction at having a safe confidante: —

"He sings like an angel, and plays on the guitar like a Spaniard! I sang for him, and he sang for me, and we sang together by the hour. Cousin Julia Clarke had a sick headache Monday, and was only too glad to have us enter-

tain one another. It cleared up by Tuesday, and Len had to go to town. But he was back Wednesday, and I was so glad to see him that I knew what it meant. Mr. Clarke was 'afraid it was dull music for me there, with Mrs. Clarke so poorly.' He is a dear old gentleman! He persuaded Len to stay until I went back to school. We rode horseback on Thursday, and had a heavenly buggy-ride on Friday. Len rides and drives as divinely as he sings and dances. He escorted me to town Monday. Cousin Julia wasn't well enough to come home with us, but she sent her maid. We put her outside, up on the box with the driver, as soon as we were out of sight of the house. That was Len's happy thought. On the way he asked me to marry him, out and out, like the honorable gentleman he is. I didn't say 'Yes' — then!"

She laughed softly and with meaning.

"But you've said it since?"

The words came reluctantly from a dry throat and mouth.

"I haven't said 'No,' and never shall. A little way out of town we took the maid into

the carriage, and I put Len out before we got to the Nunnery, you may be sure. But I see him almost every day. He walks by the schoolroom windows twice a day, and I've *happened* to meet him on the street three times, and walked out to Gamble's Hill with him, and I've spent two more Sundays with the Clarkes. All together we've managed things pretty well, I think. Len is just the cleverest fellow about such things!"

I faced her in desperate courage. The words still stuck in my throat, but I dragged them out and threw them at her.

"Sidney! I *can't* say I am glad for you! I'm as sorry as I can be that Len Brooks ever set eyes on you. He is a *bad* man! He drinks too much, and he lives by gambling, and he is *vile* in other ways! He is a dissolute rake!"

I had braced myself to face a tempest of indignant denial, such as I would have "hurled" at the slanderer of Mr. Frederic Sedley. I had rehearsed more than one such scene in imagination. Instead of storming, Sidney laughed anew, a musical gurgle of genuine amusement.

"You little gaby! Don't you suppose I

know he's wicked? That's one reason I love him! I've tried one model man. I want a change of diet!"

"You don't know what you say!" The words burst forth fast enough now. "You can't mean that you love a bad man — and because he is bad! He will make you miserable for life. He will degrade you and ruin you — body and soul!"

"What are you making that for?"

Sidney spoke sharply, arresting the hand busied with the wild tansy. I looked down at my lap in a daze. I, too, wore a white dress, and, where it lay smooth from knee to knee, I had formed the leaves into a St. Andrew's Cross, with never a thought of the shape they were taking.

I sat transfixed, gazing on the weird symbol, a pain like a knife-thrust at my heart. I had imagination. Sidney had none, or next to none, but I believed she divined something of what was clear to me. I raised my eyes to her.

"A cross of bitter herbs!" I said, in awe-stricken tones. "I didn't know what I was

doing until you spoke. Sidney Page! it means something! It is an *omen!*"

Neither knew anything of melodrama. But that was what she charged upon me, as she brushed the leaves contemptuously from my lap.

"You're foreverlastingly making up stories and acting plays to yourself, Molly Burwell! I've heard people say you had talent, but you have less common sense than anybody I know. You'll be an author — or a poet — or act plays, or something like that, some day, if you don't look out; and then you'll live and die an old maid, for sure! I'm not a genius, and I'm glad of it. I mean to marry some nice fellow — Len Brooks, I hope — and settle down into a respectable married woman, with a houseful of children, I suppose, — little plagues!"

Sidney never minced her mind into pretty dice.

"But I mean to have my swing first. Good gracious! The sun is down! The dew will take all the starch out of my frock, and I shall be late to supper!"

She worked her supple fingers into the pale pink kids as we walked up the western slope, I pulling mine on more easily, for they were of open-work white silk, and elastic. My eyes were upon them while I brooded upon the change that had fallen upon my spirit since I sat me down above the leaping spring and tinkling runlet. I should have walked up against a man in the gateway if he had not stepped aside.

"Why!" cried Sidney, at the same instant; "how *did* you happen to be here?"

"Pure coincidence!" said Mr. Brooks, bowing low, his hand upon the place where men are fabled to wear their hearts.

I knew it was a lie. His voice — I had never heard it before — rang false. His eyes were as false as his voice. I met them full for a second, as Sidney demurely introduced, "My friend, Miss Burwell!" There was an insolent smile in them, or so I fancied. He was all of thirty years old, a dandy about town. I was a schoolgirl in a plain cambric frock and second-best straw bonnet. I felt suddenly awkward, overgrown, and ill dressed. If I had

not doubted him before, I should have hated him now for having the power to put me at such wretched disadvantage.

He fell into step with us, Sidney next to him, I, sullen and shy, on the inside of the walk, and falling behind Sidney whenever we met anybody. The streets were lively with people going home to supper.

Sidney and her lover were talkative — to one another. He was gallant, with an undercurrent of tenderness he may have thought me too stupid to detect. I thought it in as poor taste as Sidney's open coquetry, and their many references to former interviews and scenes of which I could have no knowledge.

It was all ill-bred and *horrid!* Len Brooks's light tenor voice and drawl, Sidney's affected laugh, as she bandied phrases with him they fancied I did not comprehend; the exchange of glances; their very way of leaning together while they talked — became insupportable before we had walked four squares. We were at the corner of Sixth and Leigh streets, when Sidney remarked airily: —

"I hope you are not laying the flattering unction to your soul that we are going to let you walk all the way home with us? The Lady Superior would set the dogs upon you. You must leave us at Broad Street, — maybe sooner. One of the Sisterhood might be out shopping and catch a glimpse of the wolf. You *are* a wolf, you know!"

"How cruel!"

I heard no more. The Frank Mortons lived on Marshall Street below Eighth. A string of pedestrians was crossing Sixth Street toward us. I fell back to let them pass and, under cover of the moving line, I turned about and took my breathless way down the street. I calculated shrewdly that my late companions would not miss me until I was beyond recall. It was hardly within the limits of possibility that the languid dandy would run after me and tap me on the shoulder. Yet the queer twitching in my spine meant the apprehension of this arrest. As I ran up the steps of Cousin Frank's house, I ventured to glance up the street. There was, of course, no sign of pursuit. I ought to have

been relieved. In fact, my heart turned over with a seasick roll, and dropped like a pound of cold lead as far as it would go. By the time I got up to my room, I could not see the brass stair-rods for the silly tears.

Mary 'Liza was out with Cousin Molly Belle. There was no one to hear the cry with which I threw myself (when I had taken my bonnet off) face downward upon the bed — as my favorite heroines always did — and sobbed out my griefful disappointment.

"She never missed me! She would not have cared if she had!" was the first cry, made bitter by wounded vanity. Then a paroxysm of girlish weeping proved the reality of my sense of loss.

My intimacy with Sidney Page had made up so much of my happiness for two years past that disillusion was anguish. I did not try to keep the dream alive. It had died hard, but it was dead — slain by the discovery that the friend in whom I trusted was shallow of heart, coarse in sentiment, fickle, and, worst of all, vulgar in taste and in expression.

I could not be as sorry for her discarded

lover as I could have wished, as I felt was just and humane. It was not easy to be romantic over the woes of a man whose lavish use of capitals and lawlessness in the matter of spelling had jarred upon my preconceived ideas of what a love-letter should be. I recollected, too, against my will, his complacent summary of the attractions of the home she was welcome to enter as soon as she could get her wedding-clothes ready.

These defects in one man did not palliate the enormity of her action in falling in love with that monkey-faced, insolent rake!

"A good woman cannot love a bad man!"

I spat out the epigram in the remorseless arrogancy of youth.

Sidney's unblushing declaration that she loved that — *marmoset!* because he was wicked, was the axe laid at the root of the fair tree of our friendship.

By and by I got up from the bed and took a portfolio from the drawer of my writing-table. Sidney's birthday would fall on May 20 — a week off. I had written an ode to accompany the gift I had selected. Nobody had read it. Nobody was to know anything of it, excepting

Sidney. There were eight verses, of eight lines each. I read the fair copy with eyes that smarted dryly. There were no more tears to come.

Thus ran the first verse: —

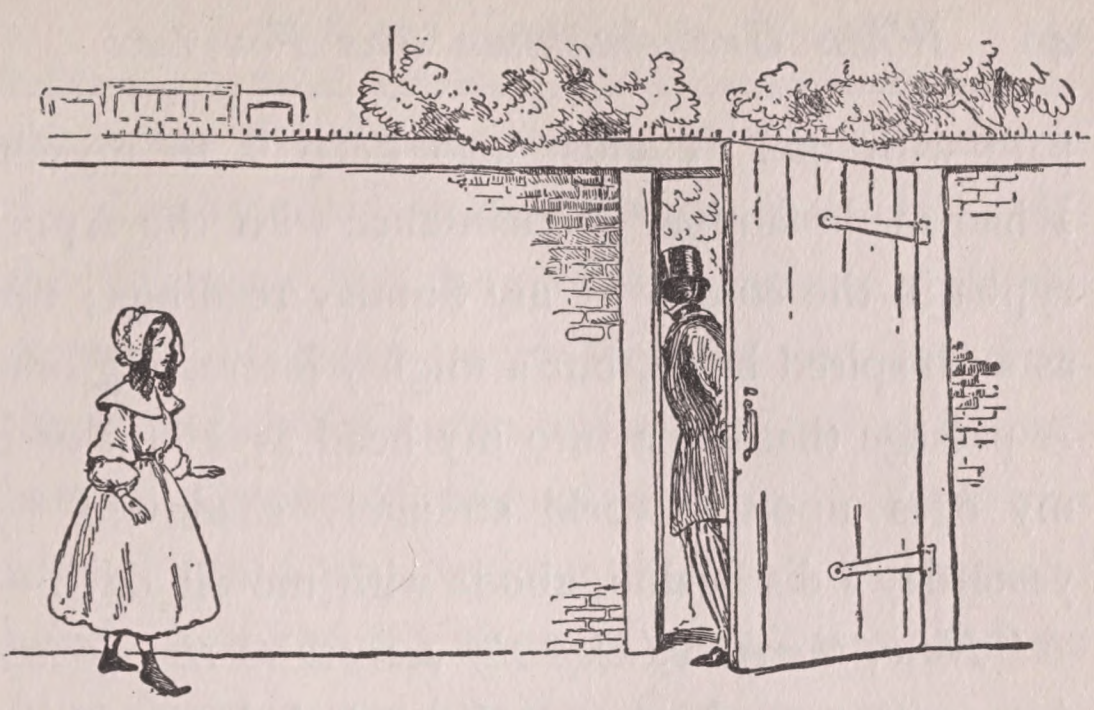
"You've not forgot the City Spring
And the tinkling brooklet sweet,
And crooked trees with whispering leaves
Arching our rude retreat.
Others might scorn th' unpainted bench
And gnarled, fantastic bough;
We loved the green nook dearly then,
I love it dearly *now!*"

Another verse — I think the sixth — might have been annotated, — "After the Irish Emigrant's Lament." I was honest in the belief that it was original when it came to me, full grown, in the silent midnight watches when Mary 'Liza had been asleep for two hours: —

"That love has saved me often, Sidney,
When my trust in man has died,
And my wounded heart put armor on
Of stern, suspicious pride.
In your dear eyes I read rebuke,
I knew your stainless truth,
And blessed the world that was your home,
Companion of my youth."

Bathos? Maybe so! But there is a strange ache in my heart while I smile at the memory.

The ache was a pang, and keen, when I tore the manuscript pages — there were four, and of scented letter-paper — into bits no bigger than my thumb-nail, and scattered them upon the garden-beds under my windows. I was suffering really and intensely, even when I leaned downward in the breezeless air, and wondered if they, too, would collect into a symmetrical shape, like my cross of bitter herbs.



Chapter III

I keep my Sorrow to Myself

"A secret at home is like rocks under tide."

— *D. M. Mulock.*

FROM my babyhood up I have found the Christian Sabbath, as we were trained to observe it in that All-so-long-ago, a benediction upon the week that lies behind it, and a tonic-promise for that succeeding the "day of rest and gladness."

I arose on the morrow of that Saturday of loss and sorrow, free from the headache that had sent me supperless to bed. There was no surcease in the sense of bereavement. Wherever I might go, and whatever I might do, I must carry my

pain with me. I must also keep it to myself. I had made familiar acquaintance with the Apocrypha in the course of my Sunday readings; not as an inspired book, but a mighty interesting one. A passage that came into my head as I unclosed my eyes upon a world strangely shadowed by yesterday's disillusion, abode with me all day: —

"*Now, therefore, keep thy sorrow to thyself and bear with a good courage that which hath befallen thee.*"

That was the duty laid upon me, — my cross of bitter herbs. I harked back continually to the "omen." I would "suffer and be strong."

The story of my disappointment, the shock of the Ideal's overthrow; the green and smarting wound in my heart of hearts — was my secret. Pride, honor, and a sense of what I owed to that dear Past and slain love sealed my lips.

I ate my breakfast in forced cheerfulness, went at nine o'clock to the Sunday-school of the Second Presbyterian Church; attended divine service morning and afternoon in the same church, and strove to pay devout heed to prayer, praise, and sermon. A family concert of sacred

music was the closing service of the holy day in the Presbyterian households of that day. All the Mortons had been Presbyterians since the secession of many godly Virginian families from the Established Church under the lead of Master Samuel Davies of blessèd memory. Time was when I could sing, without the book, at least one hundred of the "Village Hymns," compiled by John Newton and William Cowper, and in general use in Virginia churches. *Mear*, *Duke Street*, *China*, *Pilesgrove*, *Zerah*, *Dundee*, *St. Martin's*, *Hebron*, and a dozen other old tunes still bring back to me the scenes that marked the outgoings of the "Day of all the week the best," dear to the heart of the least child in the home.

We Burwells sang "by note" almost from our cradles, and the fine voices of the Mortons were a matter of traditional pride.

We had supper before sundown that the servants might have the evening to themselves. Then we adjourned to the front parlor for our concert. Mary 'Liza sat at the piano, a pretty girl of sixteen, her fair hair parted smoothly above a serious face, her voice, sweet and true, but

never strong, joining in the soprano (we called it "the air"), carried by Cousin Molly Belle, as a river bears brooks onward to the sea. She always held the babyest of the flock upon her knee, her tiny pipe joining in as soon as she had learned the least scrap of the tune. Cousin Frank's bass was strong and rich, and I had lately discovered that I could accomplish a tolerable alto. We sang thus — without book after the twilight blurred the page — until the fragrant May night set in and the baby fell asleep in her nurse's arms. Then each of us repeated a text of Scripture, and we knelt while the master of the household offered a brief thanksgiving for the pleasant "day's march nearer home," and a petition for healthful slumbers that might strengthen us for another week of work and opportunity for each soldier to do his duty at his post.

I sought my pillow in a more tranquil mood, rested, if not comforted, and the dear old tunes sang themselves over and over in my ears until I lost the echoes in dreamland.

Day broke early at that season. As a country-bred girl, I had a fancy of rising with the sun to

taste the newly made air before it was defiled by smoke and stirred dust. Richmond was an orderly town. A woman might fare forth at dawn, and walk from Rockett's to Bacon's Quarter Branch, without molestation from word or glance. Sometimes Cousin Molly Belle would advise me to take the little mulatto Rose, who had been sent from our Powhatan home to wait upon Mary 'Liza and myself, and to be trained for the duties of the office she was to fill as "own ladies' maid." She was a nice child, just my age, and would walk respectfully the conventional ten paces behind me, never speaking except when spoken to. Her presence would have irked me to-day. I longed to walk fast and far, until I had tramped away from haunting memories. But for this idea, I should have lacked courage to leave my bed. While the light was yet like the shimmer of a gray gossamer curtain outside of my window, I lay, staring dolefully at it, asking myself in all good faith, if there were aught in the world, or in life, worth the trouble of getting up and dressing for.

Then the broadening radiance of the May day called to me, and I responded by creeping silently

out of bed and dressing with such noiseless haste that Mary 'Liza's soft, regular breathing was not once intermitted. I let myself out of the front door, telling Freeman, the man-servant who was scrubbing the sidewalk, to say to Mrs. Morton that I would be back for breakfast. Then I struck into the long, steady step I had practised with Cousin Frank, who was a famous pedestrian. Meeting, on an average, but two people to a square, I held on my way, first across, then up town, until I climbed the broken ridges of Gamble's Hill and stood upon the summit.

It is a pleasure park now, laid out trimly with gravelled walks and patches of shaven sward, and furnished with benches. Houses have crowded as far up the sides of the hill as the park limits will allow, until, to the fancy of one who knew it in the heyday of the Old South, the broad breast of the ancient landmark seems to pant for breath.

As I paced the ragged turf on the brow of the eminence, crushing the sheep-mint and tansy until their protestant breath perfumed the dew-laden air, the spot was as complete a solitude as a forest dell. The hoary walls and four-sided roof

of the house which was part of the noble fortune bestowed with the love and hand of the heiress of all the Gambles upon William Wirt, were but a few rods away. There was not another human habitation within an eighth of a mile. From the gorge below arose the sonorous chant of the rapids. The Monarch of Virginia rivers dallied with his wooded islets, and spread silvery sheets over the widening channel. The city he had made and nourished into vigorous maturity was still asleep. From the thither bank green plantations swelled back gently to the horizon line of benignant hills.

"Bonny — bonny Virginia!" I cried in a sort of ecstasy. After all, it was glorious to be alive and *here!* and now — in the very heart of the wonderful nineteenth century. My heart deepened, my thoughts mounted upon wings as eagles under the inspiration of the hour and scene. I took in great draughts of the sweet, damp air from the distant heights beyond which this day which God had made was born.

I could not put all this into words, but my soul labored in the divine travail of quickened

intellect and lofty longings. Nature spoke to me through all that was best and most exalted in me. I was comforted as one whom his mother comforteth.

The air was so still that I heard every stroke of the barrack bell on Capitol Square at seven o'clock. The mellow tones awoke me as from a trance. I had just time to get home to prayers and to breakfast.

"Ah, well! I have had my toner for the day!" I murmured, hurrying down the steepest and shortest of the many paths leading to the city.

My most direct route homeward lay past Mrs. Nunham's Seminary for Young Ladies, alluded to familiarly by pupils and their gallants as "the Nunnery." It stood upon a corner, and, a square above, I turned into the street flanking the back yard and garden. The gate was ajar, held thus from within by a man's gloved hand. I could see his coat-cuff and the sleeve up to the elbow. A few rapid steps brought his shoulder and profile into view. It was Mr. Leonard Brooks! I was almost at the gate when he drew it shut at an exclamation in a voice I knew.

The street-wall was high, and embowering shrubs would screen the pair from the kitchen windows and those in the lower story of the house.

Actual physical nausea gat hold of me in the fall from sky to earth. Girlish imprudence might have the excuse of ignorance and an excess of animal spirits. In lending herself to a low intrigue, Sidney Page had sunk to the level of lady's maid and butler. I had ceased to respect her on Saturday afternoon. I felt now that I could never love her again.

Quick footfalls echoed mine before I had gone far. I knew them by intuition, as soon as they struck my ear. When they overtook me, and the pursuer caught the step from me, I would not look at him. Gazing right onward, I foolishly tried to outwalk him. When he laughed I could have struck him in his sneering face. His address was as insolent as the laugh.

"Whither away so fast, chaste Diana?" he said, and the hot blood beat into my very eyes. I grew dizzy.

"I have a message for you!" continued my tormentor.

"I don't want to hear it!" retorted I, in a towering passion. "And I can dispense with your company!"

"I have the advantage of you there!" The silky tenor voice betokened how keenly he enjoyed the scene I was making. "I like your society so much that I mean to see you to Mr. Morton's door. I am surprised that so strict a guardian of her neighbors' morals as Mrs. Morton should allow her fair ward to go out alone at this ungodly hour of the day!"

Stung beyond control, I retaliated with schoolgirlish vehemence: —

"It is quite as safe for me to be out early in the morning as it is for the young lady you have just left!"

"There we disagree again in opinion. The young lady I have just left — most unwillingly — was under my protection in her morning promenade. As you are, now! Regard for your friend leads me to insist upon taking care of you, whether you will or not. I really hope" — drawling out the words with a regretful cadence that angered me yet more than his

laugh — "that you are not going to break into a run! I am very swift of foot. You would not be so successful in getting away from me as you were on Saturday. You were not very polite, then!"

The thirty-year-old man about town was patronizingly reproachful to the gawk of less than half his age.

I locked my jaws and forged ahead. My haven of safety was now but a square away. He knew this, too, for he began to speak in a different tone: —

"Miss Sidney Page told me to give you her love — her *dear* love! and to say that she knows she can trust your honor and your discretion. She says you have the nicest sense of honor of any woman she ever knew; that you are one of the very few women with whom a friend's secret is safe!"

The speech was far too diplomatic to have originated with Sidney. This did not occur to me then. I was foolish enough to be touched to the quick by this token of her faith in me. At Cousin Frank's gate I stopped to say huskily: —

"It is not likely that Miss Page or I will ever be on intimate terms again, but you can say to her that her secret *is* safe — now and always!"

Then I walked up the steps with all the composure I could rally. At the top I heard, "I thank you in her name!" in an accent of exaggerated gratitude that made me tingle anew with wrath; from the tail of my eye I caught the shadow of an uplifted hat and a profound obeisance projected across the sidewalk by the slant sunbeams.

As I entered the house Cousin Molly Belle came out of the parlor, leading Baby Belle by the hand. She kissed me "Good morning!" and "hoped I had had a pleasant walk."

"Baby Belle and I have been watching for you ever so long!" she said, quite in her usual manner.

I reddened furiously. I knew that she had seen who my companion was, and that my confusion could not escape her quick perceptions. I felt like a hypocrite and a liar when I mumbled — "Quite pleasant — thank you!" and ran away to take off my bonnet.

Cousin Frank was a man, and he *did* ask at table in kindly solicitude if "my head was aching again, or had I walked so far and hard as to take the edge from my appetite?"

Before I could answer, Cousin Molly Belle was "sure his coffee was cold, standing so long," and ordered Freeman to bring Mr. Morton's cup to her to be filled with hot.

Cousin Frank would not let it go.

"My love!" he remonstrated plaintively. "This is just cool enough to drink. I am not a salamander!"

"Who *was* Sally Mander, Father?" asked Carter, a six-year-old, with a thirst for general knowledge.

Everybody laughed, and nobody noticed my lack of appetite again.

Monday's recitations were a serious matter, and my studious cousin, who was always at the head of her classes, was as much inclined to silence this morning as I. Our gingham frocks and cottage bonnets — Mary 'Liza's lined and trimmed with blue, mine with pink — were spick-and-span as became a new day and a new

working week. As we walked side by side, silent and thoughtful, I suppose my companion was saying over her lessons to herself. I was envying her. She had no fell secret upon her mind. She was not burning and shivering alternately at the recollection of a bad man's covert insults and the contamination of his society. She was not bowed to the dust in spirit by the loss of her trusted friend and by the sorer loss of self-respect. I was haunted by Cousin Molly Belle's grave, loving eyes as she put the box containing my noonday "snack" into my hand. The dear eyes I had never shrunk from meeting fully and gladly until now! They said to me as plainly as words could that she trusted me in the face of all that was against me in seeming.

That Leonard Brooks should have even a speaking acquaintance with me must be a painful puzzle to her, knowing him as she and her husband knew him, and that I, a raw schoolgirl, was not in the way of meeting him in society. His appearance at her door as my escort at that hour of the morning; my flushed face and evident perturbation; my inability to eat or to talk at

breakfast, and my stubborn reserve toward her, who stood in my mother's stead while I was in Richmond — all these things must have tried her faith in me and her patience with my vagaries to the utmost. Yet she trusted me and awaited my time for the explanation it was her right to demand.

Sidney Page was not in her accustomed place when we assembled in the large schoolroom for morning prayers. On the way to the recitation room, when the brief service was over, I overheard one girl wonder to another where the missing pupil was.

"I asked Miss Serena just now, and she said that 'Miss Page is indisposed this morning.' See is great upon dictionary words, you know. She told me, the other day, never to say I was 'sick,' but 'indisposed' for a slight ailment, 'ill' for a serious. So I suppose Sid has a slight ailment."

It was serious enough to keep her out of school all day. How the impression was made and how it gained ground nobody knew, but by the noon-recess the feeling that something was

amiss was prevalent. We ate our snacks anywhere in the schoolrooms that suited our convenience and whims, usually with the accompaniment of clacking tongues and cackling laughter. To-day the girls gathered in whispering coteries about interchangeable sandwiches, cake, and pickles, with furtive glances over their shoulders when a door opened, or some one passed near enough to overhear the talk. At length, the floating nebulæ of rumor materialized into a fixed belief that the "something amiss" in the orderly machinery of the school had to do with Sidney Page's absence from her accustomed haunts. "Ole Miss" — as the stately lady principal was styled behind her back — was shaken out of her habitual calm; "Big Bell" (Miss Isabella) was as savage as a blood-stained meat-axe; "See" was plaintive, and "Dolly Dumpling" (Miss Dorothy, who was short and plump) looked scared to death. Something was up! Beyond these stable islands of fact, conjectures were as boundless as the sea and as restless.

In my miserable preoccupation I turned ears that heard not, to the babble of tongues, and eyes

that saw not, to the mystified faces. My snack of cold chicken, buttered biscuits, and sponge cake was bestowed upon a charity scholar from Manchester who never brought anything but soda-crackers and cheese in her luncheon-bag. Food was gravel to my teeth and the gall of bitterness to my palate. I stole away from the gossiping crowd to the back yard; seated myself upon the lowest of the porch steps and pretended to be absorbed in a French grammar. My aspect was inclement, and the few who passed by refrained from interrupting my studies. Five minutes before the school bell recalled us to class-work, a small colored girl — a sort of "slavey" in the establishment — crept furtively up to me. She went by the name of "Munch." I have no idea what the abbreviation stood for. She had a three-cornered note in one hand. The other black paw was full of candy which I recognized instantly as Sidney Page's favorite pink cream-bars. Pink syrup oozed from one corner of Munch's mouth as she accosted me: —

"She done tell me fer to give dis ter you," said the child, in muffled accents.

The paper had pink smears upon it, and I opened it with the tips of my fingers.

"If you love me—" Sidney had written, and then drawn her pencil through the line. "If you *ever* loved me, *not a word* of what was said Saturday! *They* know about this morning, and I am *in dier disgrace.* The cat's head is out of the bag!"

No address and no signature!

I tore up the sticky scrap of paper and worked the pieces into the mould with my foot before I returned to the schoolroom.

That no element of discomfort might be lacking from that blackest of Mondays, M. Guillaume was in one of his most savage humors. He snarled like a wild cat; he roared like a lion; he laughed like a hyena; he paced the floor like a caged tiger, as the lesson proceeded. He was a disciple of the Manesca school—surely the most complex and profitless engine of education ever invented for the torture of the young idea. I was the youngest member of his senior class, and we were half through the "Improved System." Not one of many sentences, *interrogatif*

et negatif, hurled at us in his stentorian bellow was less than thirty words long, and each hapless interlocutor was called upon to reply without the interval of a quarter-second between the fall of the last syllable from his tongue (he pronounced the word "tong,") and the terrified breath in which one began — "*Parceque* — "

The two hours, lived under the glare of his eyes, the sardonic grin of his mustachioed mouth, the pelting hail of his corrections and criticisms — were enough to wreck the nerves of the average girl. We had some poor measure of satisfaction in calling him "*Le diable noir*" when out of his hearing. In class we were defenceless. He never commended, and his fault-finding was invective. When he had reduced the weaker to tears, the stronger to abject silence, and clothed all with confusion as with a garment, he was fiendishly content. To-day, with the exception of Mary 'Liza the impeccable, and one other pattern pupil, every girl in the class got from five to twenty "Imperfect" marks. As for my wretched self, I was bowled over by an *interrogatif-negatif* combined with a *subjonctif impersonnel*

before the action had lasted five minutes, and never got upon my feet again.

"I don't care!" said I, doggedly sullen, to Mary 'Liza, who opined, on the way home, that it was "hard for anybody to be invariably perfect in the French class, and that it was a pity M. Guillaume was so hasty sometimes."

Mary 'Liza always avoided the use of "strong expressions."

I was genuinely indifferent to my disgrace. In thinking of the word, I wished from the force of habit, and still sullenly, without caring much about it, that Sidney had not written "dier." One phrase in the sticky notelet ran through my brain: —

"If you ever loved me!"

She had crossed out the half sentence she had written at first. She was aware, then, that I could not love her after the revelations of the past two days! The five words set the tombstone above the dead love.

I would not let myself think what that love had been. I kept my mind fixed upon one pivotal point. I had a secret to keep that

was not mine, and I must guard it at all hazards.

A sour little smile twisted my lips when I recalled — "The cat's head is out of the bag!" There was no humor in the contortion. It was incredible that I should ever consider anything really funny again.

School was dismissed at three. The Tobacco Warehouse — "Exchange" it would be now — of which Cousin Frank was a member, closed at the same hour. Therefore, three-quarters of the people in Richmond dined between three and four o'clock, the Mortons at half-past three. We had chicken pot-pie on that Monday, a dish that my soul loved then as it loveth it now. Cousin Molly Belle looked uneasy when I left half of the portion given to me upon my plate, and surprised when I said, "No, thank you!" to her offer of transparent pudding. Still she asked no questions.

When, after spending the rest of the afternoon in my room, presumably in preparing lessons for the morrow, I came down pale and appetiteless to supper, she leaned toward me as I sat at her

right hand, and said softly, while the others were talking — "Headache again, dear?"

I nodded, the awful aching in my throat making me speechless. There was a shadow upon her face for some minutes; maternal anxiety in her eyes.

All the time I felt that she was trusting me and biding my time of disclosure. *That* hurt me through and through! For that time would never come. What I was keeping from her was not mine to impart.

The hardest fight with myself and with honor was when she followed me into the hall as I was getting myself off and upstairs after supper. She put both of her tender arms about me, drawing my head to her shoulder.

"I don't like these frequent headaches, Namesake. I am afraid you are studying too hard. You are going to bed now? I hope the poor head" — stroking it as she talked — "will be better to-morrow. If I can help you in any way, call me! I am always yours to command, you know, my child. Good night!"

Chapter IV

I am put upon the Rack

"Now, if you can blush and cry 'Guilty!'
You'll show a little honesty."

— *Shakespeare.*

INSTEAD of going to bed, I sat down by the window in my room and looked out into the night, purposeless and hopeless.

It was a warm evening. The two magnolia trees in the garden opposite were faintly lit up by many spikes of white blooms. The lamps on the age-worn front of the Strozzi Palace in Florence always remind me of magnolia blossoms in the airy grace of their uplifting. I could smell the flowers across the street, for a weak wind blew from them to me. I have never liked

the odor since. It revives too powerfully the memories of a night bordered with black for me.

Mary 'Liza was practising *The Watcher*, a new song very popular that season. The air is still sung to an infant-class hymn. Mrs. S. J. Hale wrote the words. Mary 'Liza and I had had a discussion over the fifth line of the last verse on Saturday morning.

"A smile her lips was wreathing."

"It doesn't sound grammatical to say 'her lips was wreathing,'" said my cousin.

"It *is* grammatical, no matter how it sounds," I maintained. "The smile wreaths the lips, not the lips the smile. That would be nonsense."

"Suppose we say 'A smile her lip was wreathing?'" suggested my cousin. "That is sensible and grammatical, too."

Let Mary 'Liza alone for getting neatly out of a dilemma that would have abraded another girl's temper!

She sang *The Watcher* through in her thin, sweet voice four times, while I sat there in the dark listening, and commenting upon the per-

formance with the subconscious self I did not know then by name, intimate as I was with its workings. Every time she said, "A smile her lip was wreathing."

"I suppose the upper — or lower — lip did all the smiling!" I had retorted on Saturday.

"It *sounds* better," was the placid reply.

Mary 'Liza was too amiable to quarrel. Like other amiable people, she was obstinate. She never let her guns grow hot, but she never surrendered them.

The petty annoyance of her placid persistency somehow made my real pain harder to bear. If the singer had begun upon a fifth repetition of the grewsome ballad, I felt that I must have rushed down and renewed the battle.

She ceased in the middle of the "one, two, three, four," prelude. It belonged to what my cousin Dick Carter called "the pinkety-punkety style" of composition.

There were visitors in the parlor. Men's voices sounded through the flooring. Mary 'Liza would take her books into the dining room across the hall — still placidly. Now that the

piano was stilled, a caged mocking-bird in the porch of the house over the way began to sing, and, without in the least comprehending why I did it, I began to cry — a passion of sobs that tore their way from my heart upward. The tears were still flowing, although I no longer sobbed, when I heard Mary 'Liza coming upstairs. I flew across the room to the wash-stand and dashed handfuls of cold water into my eyes.

I heard Mary 'Liza put her books upon the table in the upper hall where she could get them in the morning for a half-hour's study before breakfast. This was a sign that she was ready for bed.

"Are you sitting in the dark?" she exclaimed in the reasonless style of speech used even by pattern women on such occasions. She stood upon the threshold, peering into the room, fearing to advance lest she might trip over chair or footstool. "Cousin Molly Belle wants you downstairs if you have not gone to bed. I think some one has called who wishes to see you."

"To see me! Who is it?"

"I do not know!" She had struck a match

and was lighting the lamp. "She came into the dining room where I was studying and said: 'Will you, please, tell Molly that I should like to have her come down? If she has gone to bed, let me know.' I asked no questions."

By the dim light of the kindling lamp my mirror said that my face was not red, or blotched, thanks to cold water and a judicious dab of the powder-bag. I ran down the stairs, languidly curious as to who the visitor might be, but with no prevision of what awaited me.

Miss Isabella Nunham was the first person I noted in the tableau framed by the parlor door. She sat erect in a high-backed chair just opposite the door, and fixed me with a steely stare the instant I appeared. Near her sat Cousin Molly Belle, very grave, but composed in feature and bearing. Cousin Frank leaned an elbow on the mantel at his wife's right hand, and a little behind the ladies. I got the idea at once — or my subconscious self received it — that he was a listener, rather than a participant in whatever talk was going on. The most prominent figure of the group was a tall man, with side whiskers

like bunches of gray moss, and a very bushy head of hair, who stood bolt upright in the middle of the room, facing the door by which I was to enter. I recognized him as Judge Parke, the husband of Sidney Page's aunt for whom she was named, and by whom she had been adopted and brought up.

I had seen him but once before, and that through the schoolroom window one day when he called at the Nunnery. I had thought his an imposing presence then. It was portentous now. He stood stock-still, towering feet upon feet above my head, staring at the insignificant figure rooted, for one awful instant, to the threshold. I courtesied mechanically. It was what physiologists term, "a spasmodic action of the muscles, quite independent of conscious volition." My feet were too heavy to lift. To my fascinated gaze the eyes that compelled that gaze grew larger, and scintillated like gig-lamps seen on a foggy night.

Then Cousin Frank (blessings forever and forever upon his knightly soul!) stepped forward and took my hand in a large, warm clasp, and I

heard his voice — far off at first and not distinctly, then clear and full and in my very ears: —

"This is our cousin, Miss Mary Burwell, Judge Parke. I am confident that she will explain everything satisfactorily."

He had led me to a chair close by his wife's, and she was speaking: —

"My dear little girl, you need not look so frightened! Judge Parke wished us to send for you that he might ask you a few questions. I would not go up for you lest he might think I had prepared you to answer him."

The touch of pride in the speech appealed to his gallantry and breeding.

"Not at all, madam! not at all! I desired to draw my own inferences from this young lady's demeanor when she should hear what I have to tell in her hearing. Have I your permission" — bowing with deferential courtesy that made him for the moment a degree less ogreish to my clearing eyesight — "and yours, Mr. Morton, to examine her as to her knowledge of, and her complicity in, the plot of which I have spoken to you?"

In turning to me, he began to loom up again, to tower and to darken grimly.

"Ask as many questions as you like! I will be her security that they will be answered truthfully," returned my cousin, quietly, her hand closing more firmly upon mine.

"Always assuming that Judge Parke will bear in mind the cardinal principle of law I have heard him enforce upon the consciences of jurors," put in Cousin Frank, pleasantly, but with meaning. I comprehended I was to be considered innocent until proved to be guilty.

Guilty? And of what? My face must have asked it, for my judge answered as if I had uttered the query: —

"It would be well for me to go into the particulars of the narrative I have already given, in part, to your relatives."

He was judicial — but as hard as flint — prosecutor, witness, and judge in one.

"Mrs. Parke heard, on Saturday evening, a rumor that distressed her greatly — so greatly that I rode twenty miles yesterday morning to Mr. Curtis Clarke's in Hanover County —"

Halting abruptly, he looked keenly at me, then at my cousins.

"She has heard that name before, you will observe! Have you not, Miss Mary Burwell?"

I had felt a sort of galvanic thrill run along the cords of cheeks and mouth that contracted, then let them go. His question was a demand. I must speak.

"Yes, sir!" I said faintly.

I had never been so horribly frightened before in my life, and the nervous strain of the past forty-eight hours was beginning to tell upon me. I was weak from crying and from fasting.

"She admits that much! Good — thus far! You knew, also, Miss Mary Burwell, that Sidney Page, your most intimate friend and Mrs. Parke's adopted daughter, met at Mr. Curtis Clarke's house one Leonard Brooks, a man of no reputation — a drunken debauchee — a penniless gambler — a fellow who lives by his wits and the folly of people who are silly enough to be duped by him" — his voice rising with the sounding periods, and the veins in his forehead swelling blackly. "By Heaven!" — this to the company

at large — "I could strangle him with my bare hands when I think of my wife's niece having had any association with the scoundrel. And you, young lady," shaking a great forefinger at me, "YOU helped her to deceive the aunt who has been more than a mother to the infatuated girl! You were cognizant of the disgraceful plot to elope with this rascal to-morrow night. You were to help her run off to North Carolina and marry a drunken loafer. You have acted as the go-between of the precious pair. You cannot deny it — adepts in duplicity as you and your confederates are!"

The prosecutor had got the better of the judge, and the prosecution was a blood-thirsty hunt. Curiously enough, I found room in the tumult of emotion possessing me to pity the criminals brought to his court. As curious was the effect wrought upon me by the astounding indictment he had thundered at me. I grew steady and resolute all at once; terror fled before indignant amazement. I stood up, tremulous no longer, and looked full into his angry eyes.

"Judge Parke! I never knew that Sidney

Page meant to run away to be married until you told me just now. She never said a word to me of any such intention. I am not her confederate in any plot. I never helped her to deceive anybody. You may believe me, or not, as you please. I have told the straight truth."

I sat down again, spent and sick in the reaction from the stress of excitement. Cousin Molly Belle's arms closed about me; my head dropped upon her bosom. Her voice was a heartening cordial.

"You may believe every word she has said, Judge. I would stake my life upon her truthfulness."

Cousin Frank's word was as prompt:—

"You have nothing but circumstantial evidence in rebuttal. And previous character should go for something."

"There is no lack of direct rebutting evidence, Mr. Morton. Will Miss Nunham tell what she knows and what she saw with her own eyes? Next to Mrs. Parke and myself, these estimable ladies, Mrs. Nunham and her daughters, have been the chief sufferers in this nefarious affair."

Miss Isabella was the eldest and the tallest of the quartette of sisters. She was rigid in principle, uncompromising in decree, and uncharitable in judgment. Her duty on the present occasion was to convict of deliberate falsehood one whom she had never known to be guilty of an equivocation, or a dishonorable deed, during three years' pupilage under her eye. She did not like the task. Believing me to be a schemer and a barefaced liar, she did not shirk it. Her accents were prim and icy.

"Miss Rebecca Sanford — one of the young ladies of our family — mentioned, upon her return from a walk last Saturday afternoon, that she had seen, from the opposite side of Seventh Street, Miss Sidney Page and Miss Mary Burwell, accompanied by Mr. Leonard Brooks, walking together from the gate of the enclosure about the City Spring. They were laughing and talking together, apparently upon friendly, even intimate, terms.

"I conferred with my mother and my sisters with regard to the incident, and it was agreed between us that I should go to Miss Page's room

early Monday morning — not wishing to mar the peace of the Sabbath — and question her as to the particulars of what we were sure Judge and Mrs. Parke would consider an ill-advised acquaintanceship."

Judge Parke's emphatic nod said, "Here is a witness after my own heart."

"Which you proceeded to do," he prompted her encouragingly.

She repeated the words as he had said them.

"Which I proceeded to do. Miss Susan Patton, Miss Page's room-mate, had spent the Sabbath with friends on Church Hill, and I hoped to find Miss Page alone. Knocking at her door, and receiving no answer, I entered. She was not there. Imagining that she might be in the schoolroom, or, perhaps, that she had gone to the music room to practise before breakfast, I lingered to set her room in order to some extent."

Cousin Molly Belle pinched my arm, and I saw, as with her eyes, "Biggitty Bell" on an exploring expedition through drawers and wardrobe closet.

"The room was close and I raised the window.

As I did this my eye fell upon two figures in the yard below. They were Miss Sidney Page and Mr. Leonard Brooks."

She cleared her throat nervously, pressing her handkerchief daintily to her lips.

"Go on, if you please!" insisted the Judge, inexorable to the maidenly diffidence of his chief witness.

"They were taking an affectionate farewell."

Miss Isabella's sallow face was oddly mottled with red. In the midst of my dread of what was to follow, I was reminded of a cake of Castile soap.

"In point of fact they were hugging and kissing!" broke in my prosecutor, coarsely. "There *are* times and seasons, Miss Nunham, when the cause of truth and justice requires the most fastidious to call ugly things by ugly names. Your delicate reluctance to do this does honor to your womanhood. But I must ask that you tell us what followed the disgusting exhibition of which you were the unwilling witness?"

"When Mr. Brooks went out of the gate, he was concealed from my view by the garden wall

until he reached the corner of Fifth Street. I saw, then, that he was with Miss Mary Burwell. They seemed to be talking confidentially, and remained together until they turned into Seventh Street. There I lost sight of them."

All eyes were focussed upon me. As by an electric flash, I saw the coherence and the sequence of the evidence against me, as it must appear to my friends. Cousin Molly Belle had seen my arrival at her gate escorted by Leonard Brooks. I had offered no explanation of the singular occurrence, and my behavior for the two succeeding days was unnatural. In the depth of my anguished soul I acknowledged that I could not complain if she were to condemn me, then and there, and cast me out of her heart forever. Had she pushed me away from her with loathing, she would have been justified by what she had heard. And I had no defence except my simple word, unsupported by a scrap of evidence! — no backing except the "character" Cousin Frank had alluded to just now.

Where the strength came from I do not know, but, with the odds all against me, I stood up

again and faced my accusers. I talked very fast, for I was doubtful how long the power of speech would last.

"Mr. Brooks met us Saturday as we were coming away from the City Spring. I stayed with them until we got to Marshall Street. Then I came home by myself. I went out to walk alone this morning, and never saw him until I caught a glimpse of him at Mrs. Nunham's back gate. He overtook me at the corner and *would* walk with me. I told him I didn't want his company. He knew that I meant what I said, but he would not let me alone. I have never spoken a dozen sentences to him in my life. I never said anything to him and never met him before last Saturday. I was never a go-between for him or anybody else. Nobody has asked me to do it. I am nobody's accomplice. If you were to put me on the rack, I could tell you nothing more. I have told the truth to you, and nothing but the truth!"

Judge Parke was not a bad man. He was prejudiced against me, and he was very angry. Yet the sneer with which he put out his hand to

intercept my movement toward the door was malevolent: —

"Very well acted, young lady! But there are a few other questions for you to answer before I am through with you!"

Cousin Frank interposed. He was angry, too, but he had his temper well in hand.

"Excuse me, Judge Parke! I have consented to your examination of this child — this baby, by comparison with you and me! — because I felt that you had much cause to be indignant and suspicious, and I wished to give you every possible opportunity to get at the exact truth. I will not have her cross-examined in my house — or anywhere else if I can help it. Mrs. Morton and I are convinced that she has told you all she knows about this unfortunate affair. Let the investigation end here and now. She shall not be held upon the rack for one minute longer!"

The Judge bowed, but the sneer was there still.

"As you say, Mr. Morton! My belief in her complicity in what you are pleased to gloss over as 'an unfortunate affair' remains unchanged.

Yet I bow to your decision, with one proviso. This young *lady*" — the sneer was tigerish — "has said glibly — I do not say 'pertly' in your house — that she has told the truth and nothing but the truth. Will you ask her in your name — not in mine, or in the name of justice and honor — if she has told the whole truth, *as she knows it*, with regard to her bosom friend's relations with this scoundrelly Brooks?"

Cousin Frank stood by me, holding my hand, during his defence of the forlorn "child" he befriended so bravely. Without a moment's hesitation he put a finger under my chin and lifted my face so that I could look into his kind eyes. Kind — and trustful! *That* was the stab!

"Molly, dear! You can say the rest of it — can't you? *We* don't need to hear a word more, but it is fair to yourself to say it to others!"

For one wild, agonized second I was tempted to befoul my soul with a downright lie; for another, to brazen it out and to defy my tormentor. Every door of hope was closed except these two. And everything dear to me hung

upon the next sentence. I hope to heaven never to be met by another such temptation. My guardian angel may be farther away from me than he was on that black-cross night.

"I *can't* say it, Cousin Frank!" I said low and brokenly.

With the supreme effort I lost sight of his shocked face. I heard but three words of Judge Parke's triumphant exclamation, before I passed away from them all into what I felt was death.

The next thing I knew I was in my grave, lying peacefully under the sod, released from the torture that had beaten the soul out of my body — and thankful to be just where I was.

It was dark, and cool, and comfortable, beyond compare, in that safe retreat. My mind was clear, yet I felt that I was not "all there." Something was missing from the Ego (I called it that) that had lived in that upper world. Not the body, certainly. Not the mind, or I could not think and reason. Was it the mysterious essence of immortality we call "the soul"? Had that preceded the rest of me into the other life? What then gave me consciousness? What

must rejoin the soul before the indestructible Ego would be perfect?

A thought came to me. I had read lately in a German book the theory of the tripartite nature of the Human Creature. According to this, each of us is made up of the physical life; the soul, comprehending the intellect and the emotions; then, the spiritual, a tenuous essence that will never leave the body until mortality claims its own and sets the seal of decay upon the clay tabernacle.

I wished I could get back to that old sphere long enough to explain to other people, as eager to learn of the Great Mystery as I once was, just how these things are, and how gentle is the process of "passing," so dreaded by those born of woman that we are, all our lifetime, subject to bondage through fear of death.

Although so far underground, I could hear the birds singing over me, and a kind of joyous rustle I knew was the stir of the growing roots of grass and flowers.

Presently — after many tranquil, dreamless hours — I heard the sound of hurried breathing

as of some one running fast toward me. It grew louder and louder. I hoped the runner would not pass directly over my head and break my blessèd repose. The murmur of voices mingled gradually with the quick-drawn breaths which I began to comprehend were my hurried respirations.[1]

The first voice I knew was Cousin Molly Belle's.

"She is coming around all right, now! The whole thing is as clear as daylight to me, Frank! That artful girl took the poor, dear child into her confidence so far as she pleased, and bound her over not to tell. Molly would be cut into bits before she would betray another person's secret."

I knew, by now, where and what I was. I sighed in opening my heavy eyes.

"How did you know?" I whispered.

She laughed and kissed me.

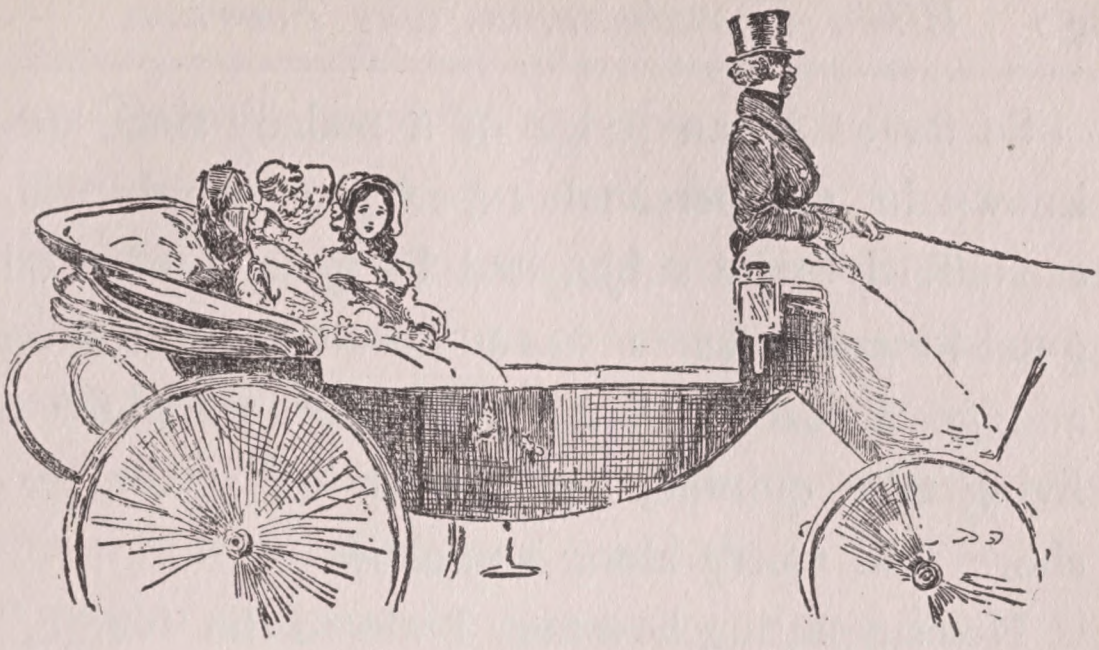
"Don't talk or think now, Namesake! There will be time enough for that!"

Her sweet eyes were full of tears.

[1] Every feature of the swoon-fantasy was an actual experience.

And neither then, nor ever, did she ask any questions as to the "whole truth" she had guessed in part.

Cousin Frank and I, in talking of her, often agreed that if Solomon had lived in the middle of the nineteenth century, he would have revised the first edition of Ecclesiastes 7 : 28, having, at last, found his "Woman among a Thousand."



Chapter V

Duped Again!

"The mouse that hath but one hole is quickly taken."

—*Herbert.*

IT was a week before I was allowed to leave my chamber. I was not "ill" according to Miss Serena's definition, for my indisposition was at no time serious. Nothing was written of it, or of the cause of it, to my parents. My mother had a baby boy, three weeks old, and it was thought best not to trouble her with the story. I suppose my ailment would be diagnosed in our day as nervous prostration. We may have known of the thing itself then. The name it goes by with modern physicians and wealthy patients had not been manufactured.

So far as I can judge of a malady since unknown in my personal experience, people who can afford to be subjugated by general physical good-for-nothingness have nervous prostration and go abroad. Those who must work for a living take quinine, and a week off at the seashore, and worry along somehow.

Not suspecting how near I was to the "verge," I obeyed orders, swallowed tonics and nourishing food, and lay upon a sofa by day, as by night, except when Cousin Frank carried me downstairs in his arms to put me into a carriage, and Cousin Molly Belle took me for an easy, out-of-town drive. Not a book was to be opened in my sight, and agitating topics were strictly forbidden by the family physician. My slumbers were light and broken. I would awake from uneasy dreams, struggling for breath and throwing out my hands like one drowning. Cousin Molly Belle's voice and touch were ready on the instant to sooth and reassure me.

She told me frankly, to end suspense that would be harder to bear than anything else, that Judge Parke had taken his ward home with him

on Tuesday morning, and that there had been a terrible scene with Leonard Brooks, whom the irascible old gentleman had threatened to shoot should he ever attempt to reopen communication with his wife's niece.

Cousin Frank had come into the room while his wife was talking, and heard the threat.

"He need not be uneasy on that point," he said, dryly. "The Judge's assurance that his niece would never see a dollar of his money if she married him was enough for Len. That was what he had counted upon. The general impression is that the poor girl will be an heiress."

"Poor girl!" echoed I.

Cousin Molly Belle rejoined, "You may well say it!" and there the matter dropped. Several weeks afterward the story went through the school that Sidney was to travel at the North with her aunt during the summer, and that she was "kept very strict." I heard no more of her until —

But — as the master of short-story writing puts it — "that is another story."

I record with satisfaction that, before leaving Mrs. Nunham's house, Sidney confessed to her

that I was totally ignorant of her elopement scheme. Miss Isabella made a special call upon Cousin Molly Belle to inform her of this, and, like the upright woman she was, to express her penitence for the unjust suspicions she had entertained and expressed.

So, when I returned to school, I had no prejudices to live down. The teachers received me with marked cordiality, and the girls were friendly. The ordeal through which I had passed left traces which were not to wear away in a long time. I was not exactly embittered toward my kind. The unshaken loyalty of my cousins, and the confidence in my integrity expressed by my preceptors, held me back from misanthropy. I did, however, resolve to have no more intimate friends. In that direction —

> "My wounded heart put armor on
> Of stern, suspicious pride."

I was on pleasant terms with my mates, but I had no confidences with any of them. As the days went on, I was — to quote darling Marjorie Fleming — "puffed up with majestic pride" that my stoical resolution did not waver. I cultivated

a dignified serenity of demeanor, a polished civility, warranted to hold the most presuming schoolgirl at arm's-length. I studied assiduously during recess, and when school was over I went directly home.

It was, therefore, a surprise to me when, on the first day of June, which fell on Tuesday that year, Julia Dorman, a "really and truly" grown-up young lady who had entered the school at Christmas as a parlor boarder, joined me upon the rustic seat under a rusty Otaheite mulberry tree in the back yard, where I had stationed myself with my book for the rest of the intermission, and accosted me cordially. She was a stately girl, eighteen years old, with a high forehead and an aquiline nose. Her voice was singularly musical in speaking, her manner winning when she cared to win. Her father had been a Congressman, I think, and he was distinguished in other ways. I heard her say once, incidentally, that he might have been President if he had been less conscientious. She had also let fall several times, in my hearing, allusions to her cousin, Major Peachy, "a retired army officer." Altogether, we juniors

had the impression that her forebears and congeners walked and stood very high in society and state. She dressed tastefully and went to parties of various kinds several times a week. As a parlor boarder she took special branches — music and drawing and French conversation.

Dignified serenity and calm civility was hardly the rôle to be adopted by her junior and subclass scholar. I arose, when she approached, to give her the whole seat. My amazement was unutterable when she passed her arm about my waist, and drew me back upon the bench close to her side.

"What a shy, unapproachable being you are!" she began in her soft contralto. "I have been longing to know you better all these months, but others had stronger claims upon you."

This was the beginning of our more familiar intercourse. She did not seek intimacy. As she told me, she "was not one to form violent friendships. Whatever is of value is of slow growth." But she let me see that she liked me, and that she enjoyed my society. On Wednesday, she invited me to walk with her. We took in Pizzini's on our way

home, and she treated me to ice cream and bon-bons. On Friday, she asked me if I would mind going down-town with her in the afternoon. She had oceans of shopping to do before she went home; and it was such a bore to go alone! I had meant to walk somewhere, and I said so, with as fair a show of dignified serenity as I could assume, and of which I was ashamed when she thanked me sweetly for giving up a pleasure stroll to gratify her. She bought a great many things, taking lighter parcels home, and ordering the heavier to be sent to Mrs. Nunham's. Some of the things were charged to herself, some to "Major Montague Peachy, The Virginia House." As we parted at Mrs. Nunham's gate, she took a filmy handkerchief from her pocket and gave it to me.

"I wouldn't have it wrapped up because I wanted you to take it home with you now. I bought it expressly for you."

As I stammered my thanks, she stooped to kiss me — there in the street — impulsiveness for which I was not prepared, and told me I was "too bewitching for anything!"

Next morning "Munch" brought a note around to me soon after breakfast.

"DEAR MOLLY," it said, "A friend of my cousin Major Peachy is going out of town for a couple of days and has lent me her carriage for the whole of to-day, if I want it. It is too warm for much walking, so I propose that you and I avail ourselves of her kindness and do a long morning's shopping on wheels. We will have a drive first, and I will bring you home in time for dinner.

"*Do* go! I will call for you at half-past nine, if you say 'Yes.'

"Affectionately yours,

"JULIA PEACHY DORMAN."

I showed the note to Cousin Molly Belle, as I had showed the handkerchief. She read it over twice — which I thought strange, and read the signature aloud, stroking her chin thoughtfully. Then she said: —

"I see no reason why you should not go, Molly dear. And I hope you will have a jolly outing!"

I was ready when Julia called for me. I had put on a white lawn frock, dotted with bunches of pinks. My sash was pink and I wore my best bonnet, a Neapolitan straw so thin that the pink lining blushed through it. My gloves were white. Cousin Molly Belle approved of my looking as nice as possible on this expedition, if it *was* on a week day. The carriage was new and handsome. The coachman was spruce and gray-haired. The horses were black and sleek.

"You suttinly is goin' shoppin' like a queen, terday!" chuckled Flora, Cousin Molly Belle's maid, giving a parting twitch to my sash-bows, as the carriage drew up to the curbstone.

I thought the same to myself, but betrayed no undue satisfaction as I sank back in the luxurious cushions, and we rolled down the street. Our drive was to be up-town, and while we took it, Julia Dorman told me the story of Major Peachy's friend, the fortunate owner of carriage and horses.

"You must have heard of her," she said. "Miss Barbara Allen? She lives on Franklin

Street, in that fine, old, red brick house surrounded by a garden."

I recollected the name, I told her, on account of the old ballad, and I repeated the first verse: —

> "'Twas in the blooming month of May,
> The buds they were a-swelling,
> Young Jamie on his death-bed lay
> For love of Barbara Allen."

Julia laughed.

"Isn't it an absurd name? There was a romance in her life, too. She was a beauty and a belle in her day, I have heard my mother say. She was engaged for seven years to my cousin, Major Peachy. He's my father's cousin, you know. Old Mr. Allen was opposed to the match, for some reason. I believe he did not want Miss Barbara to marry anybody, and he took a dislike to Major Peachy. I don't see why! My mother says he was as handsome as a picture when he was in his prime. He was in the War of 1812, although a mere boy, and showed great bravery. When Lafayette was in Richmond in 1824, Major Peachy was

about thirty, and Miss Barbara Allen twenty-five. They were the handsomest pair of dancers at the Lafayette ball. Lafayette said she was the finest-looking woman he saw in America."

I had heard the same story of a dozen other belles in various cities visited by the illustrious marquis, and believed in my heart that each was true. The gallant Frenchman understood and lived up to his duty in the matter of homage to the sex that adored him. Having learned by now that the saving sense of humor was lacking from the composition of my new friend, I forbore to interpolate at this point of the romance.

"She had a sister, much younger than herself, a very pretty girl, who was educated in France — or in England. Maybe in both. Her uncle had some foreign appointment, and when Mrs. Allen died, Agnes, then a little girl, went to live with her aunt, and Miss Barbara stayed to take care of her father. It almost *killed* her to let her sister go. Their mother had been an invalid ever since Agnes was born, and Miss Barbara took care of her entirely. When Agnes was eighteen her aunt died, and Mr. Allen died,

L. OF C.

and Miss Barbara went across the ocean to bring her "child," as she always called her, back to America. Major Peachy wanted her to stay at home and marry him. But she said, "No! something was due to her father's memory, and he had begged her on his death-bed not to be married under a year after he died." Well, she brought Agnes home, and Major Peachy fell desperately in love with her at sight, and in six months he married her!"

"Horrible!" I cried. "What base double treachery! How did Miss Barbara live through it?"

"My mother said she behaved *magnificently!* Her father had left three-fourths of his fortune to her. She divided the estate in half, and set Agnes up in a pretty home of her own, Miss Barbara keeping the homestead. Nobody ever heard a murmur from her. To all appearance she was entirely satisfied with the new arrangement. Agnes lived but two years. Since her death Miss Barbara and Major Peachy have been the best friends in the world. He spends all his evenings there."

"Why don't they get married?"

"A man can't marry his sister-in-law. At least, not in Virginia. And she is a Presbyterian. It's against the law of their church. And" — indifferently — "I don't suppose they ever think of such things now. She must be fifty, and he is five years older, you know."

The shopping expedition was a grand success. As soon as the carriage, laden to the windows with parcels, had set me down at home, I rushed up to Cousin Molly Belle's room with my burden of gossip. We had visited dry-goods stores by the half dozen; likewise fancy stores and confectioners, peeped into two book-stores, divided an hour between two jewellery "establishments," and "looked at things" in a china shop, and an apothecary's who had a fine assortment of knickknacks and perfumery.

"We had ice cream at Pizzini's at twelve o'clock, and cake, of course," I concluded. "And Julia would force a pound of candy upon me. She is a very generous girl. It was all I could do to make her keep a gold pencil and a wee breastpin she bought at Mitchell and Tyler's.

She had set me to looking at something else while she bought them, lest I should see them. After we were in the carriage she showed them to me, and was quite hurt when I said I did not think you would like to have me accept such expensive presents from anybody outside of the family."

"You were quite right, dear," responded my cousin.

There was a little puzzled plait between her eyebrows as she said it, and she looked thoughtful, as when I had brought the handkerchief home. I recalled this afterward. Just then, I was full of what had interested me far more than the lavish outlay of my companion's money upon such trifles as silks, laces, smelling bottles, handkerchiefs, silk stockings, gloves, brooches, pencil cases, and rings. I had a new romance to share with my cousin. She and my father were among the few people in my small world who never called me "odd" and "notional" — meaning fanciful.

I had barely begun the tale and found that she knew Miss Barbara Allen slightly and had heard something of her early disappointment, when

dinner was announced. Visitors followed the meal, and it was twilight before I could get Cousin Molly Belle's ear for ten minutes. At the end of that time, Cousin Frank, who had had a busy day down-town, came in, looking care-worn and weary, and I knew her first duty was to him. Then came supper and more calls.

I stole quietly upstairs, for I was in a revery, but more light of heart than I had been since that fateful other Saturday and its cross of bitter herbs. Mary 'Liza had gone out to tea with one of the day scholars, and there was no one to intermeddle with my story weaving. Tired in body, I threw myself upon the bed, my crossed arms under my head, and wrapped myself in my fantasies as in the robe of invisibility I used to read of in fairy-tales. From the open tabernacle glided my Mosaic Ideal, and sat down beside my "couch," and we held long and sweet converse together. I had no secrets from him, and he gave fullest sympathy in all. We went over the romance of the old lovers in detail. Barbara had sacrificed herself to secure the happiness of the man she loved, and to save her pretty young

sister from heart-break. Hearts like Barbara's did not break. They suffered and grew strong.

I repeated softly, but audibly, to my Frederic (of whom I always thought without the final *k*): —

"Within my soul there is no light
Save the pale light of stars;
I give the first watch of the night
To the red planet Mars.

"O Star of Strength! I see thee stand
And smile upon my pain,
Thou beckonest with thy mailèd hand
And I am strong again.

"Oh, fear not in a world like this,
And thou shalt know ere long,
Know how sublime a thing it is
To suffer and be strong!"

Repetition of the words I knew so well was like the pressure of a cup of healing to my lips. I murmured them, over and over, and drew from them a martyr's courage.

"That," said Frederic, in response, "should be the specific effect of suffering upon God's children. Be sure whatever HE appoints is

exactly adapted to their needs. He never blunders."

That was his style of speech. Is it any wonder that association with him disinclined me to listen to the rattle of the flesh-and-blood men my girl acquaintances found "fascinating"? Among other debts of eternal gratitude I owe to Mr. Frederic Sedley is the fact that when material suitors came, in the days when the brook widened into the river, I held myself superior to flirtations and "scrapes" with which other girls amused themselves and tantalized admirers. Almost every young woman in my set was engaged more than once — some were betrothed eight and ten times before they were safely married. It was a fashion in my day. After my Mosaic Model was relegated to Mythland, his influence remained with me; he had made my ideals high and pure. The desire to prove myself worthy of them was antiseptic and sanitary. I would never give my hand unless love, warranted to wear for all time, went with it.

But that, too, is another story.

Cousin Molly Belle had a succession of visitors

that evening. She was a popular woman in Richmond, as she had been in her native county. The stream of merry talk, made musical by soft Southern voices and intonations, and the ripple of laughter, were a pleasing accompaniment to my musings. A summer shower had cleansed and cooled the air in the afternoon; the breeze, stealing between the bowed shutters, was fragrant with the breath of garden flowers; the mocking-bird across the way whistled softly bars from *O Summer Night.*

I had fallen asleep peacefully where I lay, my head upon my arms, an hour before Mary 'Liza came in to awaken me and to reprove me gently for tumbling my lawn dress by lying down in it.

Sunday passed as usual, and I went to school on Monday morning with no premonition of new evil. Knots of girls were gathered about the desks, whispering furtively, or uncomfortably silent, as I made my way to the top of the large room where my place had been for a year past. I thought nothing of the unlikeness of the scene to the usual merry tumult preceding lesson hours until the entrance of General and Mrs. Nunham

with the four daughters in their train, and a certain commingling of repressed emotion in their faces, and of expectation in those of the pupils, created an atmosphere I felt was foreign and ominous. The devotional exercises prefacing the business of the forenoon were held as usual, and, as usual, the classes that were to recite first, defiled into the halls on their way to the recitation rooms. I was at the foot of the stairs leading to the music room on the second floor, when I recollected having left upon the piano last Friday a book I would need within an hour. I had raced to the top of the flight when I heard "Miss Mary Burwell!" called from below. Miss Isabella was in such hot pursuit that she again reminded my incorrigible fancy of the cake of castile soap. She was quite out of breath, too, with climbing or excitement.

"May I ask whither you are going?" she demanded, magisterial, although flustered.

I explained. Instead of going back, she trod upon my heels as I entered the music room. The book was there just where I had left it. Julia Dorman was there, too, dressed for travel-

ling, except that she had no bonnet on. She was collecting her scattered music from the piano top and piling it neatly together. At sight of me she smiled, and came forward with outstretched hand.

"Ah, Molly!" the mellow contralto as even and musical as ever. "It is kind in you to come up to say 'Good-by!' to me!"

"Are you going away?" I blurted out, taken utterly aback by the intimation.

She smiled — the slow, bland gleam that was one point of her unlikeness to the rest of us girls.

"Yes, my dear. I go to-day. I am sorry we are to have no more walks and rides together. I graduate in a couple of hours, now. Good-by!"

I was too confounded to return the careless kiss she dropped upon my mouth. As she glided gracefully out of the room I stared after her with bewildered eyes. Miss Isabella had judged me unjustly once. She was not one to make another blunder along the same line.

"Sit down, Miss Burwell," she ordered sternly, yet not harshly. "I wish to talk with you for five minutes. You will then comprehend why I could not allow you to have any private commu-

nication with Miss Dorman — why, whatever you have to say to her, or she to you, must be said in the presence of a third person."

After which startling preamble, she told me briefly, and in strong language, of the latest disgrace in the highly respectable institution presided over by her mother.

I gladly make the story yet shorter. Julia Dorman — the stately, high-bred parlor boarder, who had added prestige to the aristocratic Nunnery — was an adroit shoplifter and a clever thief. Nowadays, the woman who steals all she can carry away without detection, — steals when she has money enough to buy whatever she wants, and who gives away what she steals; who is, moreover, subject to periodical and uncontrollable attacks of the aforesaid thievish propensity, — is a Kleptomaniac. Public opinion says there must be a motive for every violation of law. In the times of ignorance in which I had my first hard lessons in the fine art of living, this girl was adjudged to be a common felon. Her pilfering had been suspected for some time. For a month past she had been "shadowed" by a private de-

tective. Last Saturday's peculations had brought matters to a crisis. Major Peachy had been notified of certain discoveries. A special messenger was sent for her father on Sunday. He was expected hourly. Her trunks had been examined under Mrs. Nunham's own eyes, and the revelation — as Miss Isabella phrased it — "beggared belief." She had stolen towels, collars, laces, trinkets, and "miscellanies" from every member of the household. The thefts had been attributed to the servants, poor little Munch suffering most severely in the estimation of the victims.

I — credulous, conceited visionary that I was! — had been her useful tool. But for the previous predatory expeditions that had fastened suspicion upon her, I, too, would have been marked and watched. As it was — maybe because I had, upon a former and a painfully recent occasion, proved so gullible — I was acquitted of all save egregious folly.

This was what I sobbed out to Cousin Molly Belle, to whom I fled for shelter from the shower of ridicule I felt would descend upon me if I showed my face again in the schoolroom. Miss

Isabella, moved almost to tears by the extremity of my humiliation, sent after me a note to my guardian full of regretful sympathy. When I could bear to read it, I learned that Cousin Frank's influence and his stainless reputation had been my most effective shield.

Of this, I cannot trust myself to speak,— even now.

I draw a veil over the valley of the shadow of disgrace in which I believed myself to be lying for the next ten days. I spent them in bed. I had slipped over the "verge."

Chapter VI

Miss Barbara Allen

"We grant, although he had much wit,
He was very shy of using it,
As being loath to wear it out,
And therefore bore it not about."

— *Hudibras.*

MISS BARBARA ALLEN had called to see Cousin Molly Belle the very day of that lady's return to town. From her my cousin heard that the articles charged, without his knowledge, to Major Peachy, were restored to the merchants from whom they were bought. For those sent to Mrs. Nunham's and charged to that lady, payment had been made by the shoplifter's friends. A number of valuables, chiefly laces and

jewellery, were not forthcoming. The kleptomaniac had secreted them about her person while in the store, and afterwards given or thrown them away, or otherwise disposed of them. All these were paid for, and the matter was hushed up so far as was practicable.

Miss Allen's method of crushing the cockatrice of gossip was thorough. She refused flatly to hear, or to speak one word of what she had determined should go no farther. The snakes of scandal that got to her were killed summarily. There was no "scotching." She had one full, frank talk with the woman who hated tattling as heartily as herself, and that talk was as short as was compatible with a thorough understanding of the facts in the case. At her request, I was told that Julia Dorman was never under Major Peachy's guardianship, although at the request of her father the Major had called to see her, and introduced her to Miss Allen. Julia had asked for the use of the carriage on that Saturday forenoon, alleging that she was not well enough to walk far in warm weather, and that she had a long country memorandum to fill upon short notice.

"The most disgusting business I was ever mixed up in!" was Miss Barbara's summing-up. "And in nothing more villainous and detestably low than the finishing iniquity of dragging that innocent child of yours into it, as a blind. Say to her how sorry and ashamed I am, and ask her to show that she forgives Major Peachy and myself by letting us do something to make the rest of her stay in Richmond pleasant. I shall beg to be allowed to see her as soon as she can receive company. Make her understand that henceforward no allusion to this abominable affair will ever pass my lips."

She sent flowers, ice cream, jellies, or fruits to me daily while I kept my bed, and one fine morning, unusually cool for mid-June, as I sat in an easy-chair by the front window, I saw the new carriage, the spruce coachman with iron-gray wool, and the prancing horses, shining like black haircloth sofas, stop at our gate. A tall lady alighted and walked briskly up the steps. A few minutes later, Cousin Molly Belle's soft call from the lower hall prepared me for the long-expected visit. She would not come up in advance lest

the incident might take the form of an "occasion."

"Molly, dear!" she said. "I am bringing Miss Allen up to see you. Do you hear?"

My heart was in my throat, but I managed to speak distinctly:

"Yes, ma'am! I shall be very glad to see her!"

Which was what she and my mother, whom she represented just now, would have had me say. All the same, I put my hand to my throat to keep the throbbing, jumping organ in its place.

The visitor entered breezily, but not boisterously, talking all the way from the door to my window.

"Don't get up, my child! Sit still! I'll wager my head against a cymbling, Mrs. Morton, that she is saying over to herself —

'And they all said, "Cruel Allen!"'

Don't try to deny it, lassie! Your eyes are too truthful!"

I blushed up to the tell-tale eyes, but I laughed, too.

"I couldn't help thinking of the song," I pleaded.

"Of course not! Everybody who has heard it — and who hasn't? — must think of it as soon as my name is spoken. I asked my mother once, why — when there are, as people say, fifteen hundred proper names, feminine gender, in different languages — she saddled a then sinless infant with one that would make her a perennial joke. She said she never thought of 'Barbara Allen's Cruelty!' Her mother's Christian name was Barbara, and my father's surname was Allen. She tacked one to the other. It was a sum in simple addition. Result — here am I!"

"I am very glad you are!" said I, involuntarily, letting my hand lie confidingly in that which had taken it in a cordial grasp as kind as a woman's, as firm as a man's.

She gave it a little menacing shake.

"You can't flatter me, little woman! Flattery of my time-battered self is like firing at a horse-block with a pea-shooter."

"But I really thought it!" I hastened to assert. "And" — coloring again — "it slipped out before I knew!"

"*That* is really worth having! Now, what *I*

am thinking is how long it will take you to clap a bonnet on your head — never mind about gloves! — and get into the carriage that's waiting for you at the door. For I am going to take you for an airing. Yes! you are strong enough, and it will make you stronger every time the wheels go round. I met your doctor on my way here, and he endorses my prescription. I should have come all the same if he hadn't. I'd like to see Bob Haxall laying down the law to me who have known him ever since he was in roundabouts!"

Not until I was packed away between pillows on the back seat of the carriage, Miss Barbara sitting opposite, had I a chance to scrutinize her. Introduction, proposition, and abduction had been the work of five minutes.

She wore her own curling gray hair, looped from the temples below the ears. Most elderly Southern ladies at that date covered graying locks with false "fronts" and frizettes.

Miss Allen carried herself nobly, seated bolt upright in the middle of the cushions, disdaining to loll, or to accept the support of any back except

her own. Her forehead was broad; her eyes were dark gray, well opened, and expressive, her mouth was somewhat large, with spirited, mobile curves. Her teeth were her own, and perfect. The face was strong and intelligent. I had expected to see a beautiful woman, or one whose remnant of beauty bore out the tradition of the diplomatic Frenchman's compliment. She was thin to gauntness, and the high cheek-bones were a suggestion of Scotch ancestry.

Yet she charmed me from the first. Then and always, she drew out what was worthiest in my mind and heart. The eccentric intimacy between us, dating from that hour and springing from the odious episode which brought us together, was like the growth of a healthy flower, sweet and vigorous, from rotting ooze.

Our drive was but half an hour long. She "did not want to tire me." To-morrow, if I were as much stronger as she hoped to see me, we would go for an hour, and then she would beg Mrs. Morton to lend me to her for a day or two. Change of air — even to another part of the city — would do more for me than all the apothe-

caries and doctors in town. Apothecaries and doctors went as naturally together as bottle and cork. Neither was worth a fig without the other. Fresh air and fresh company, fresh eggs, fresh milk, and fresh fruit were her King-Cure-All.

I had promised Cousin Molly Belle and myself to think as little as possible of that former drive in this same vehicle, and I was relieved that, instead of going in the direction we had taken last week, we drove down Main Street, and then, by devious ways, made necessary by the imperfect grading of that day, climbed to the summit of the hill, around by "old St. John's." In the open fields outlying church and surrounding dwellings, Miss Barbara ordered the coachman to stop that I might enjoy the view.

While I took in gratefully the picturesque effects of broad river, green fields, and swelling hills encompassing the fair city in a loving embrace, my hostess told me how this was once the Court end of town, the most fashionable, as it must always be the most beautiful.

"What made the change?" I asked regretfully.

"The devil and his followers know, child!

Somebody whose name is forgotten, as it ought to be, started the race for Shockoe Hill, and it was like the pell-mell run of the swine down a steep place — with the difference between down and up. Don't ask me where this race will stop. I shouldn't be surprised to see Fashion straddling Bacon's Quarter Branch."

I bethought myself of the phrase last week in driving far past the Branch without leaving curb-stones and pavements behind us.

"Yet you live on Shockoe Hill?" I ventured.

Positive as her utterances were, she never intimidated me.

"Yes! for my sins, which are many! On Franklin Street, in the house where I was born, and in which, please God! I'll die. When my father built it, it stood in the middle of a grove, with fields all around it. For me to leave it now would be like a tairrapen" (terrapin) "shedding his shell."

She took me into the "shell" two days later in the week. Her house was as odd and as interesting as the owner. The bricks were embrowned by age, and gray in patches. With rare good

taste she would not have them made smart with paint. The spread of the hoary patches was to her a genuine satisfaction.

"We are growing gray together," she would say.

The surrounding garden was spacious. Tea was served in an arbor on the day of my arrival. In a veritable arbor, ten feet square in the clear, with a white gravel floor, and walled and roofed with honeysuckles and multiflora roses. A rug was spread over the gravel, and a colored "dining-room servant," his head peppered and salted like the carriage driver's, brought out a table and set it upon the rug. Then he, and his subordinates — a half-grown boy and a woman — laid the cloth, and set all manner of Old Virginia dainties in gracious order upon it.

I watched them with keen interest from my seat on the window-bench in the back parlor. It was like the good old times to be keen about anything again. The garden was a study in itself. Box borders crisscrossed it up and down, and from right to left. They were solid green walls, four feet high, and squared on top like a stone

coping, such was the perfection of the pruning, and the solstitial sun had soaked to their hearts. In cooling, they threw off aromatic sighs. I inhaled the warm perfume ecstatically.

"I never understood until now how one might 'die of a rose in aromatic pain'!" I ejaculated.

Miss Barbara never remarked upon the bookish talk ridiculed by the schoolgirls when I let myself backslide into it. Taking it as a natural mode of expression, she humored it by kindly interest.

"Those old poets knew pretty well what they were talking about," she answered, now. "People learned them by heart when I was young. I could repeat the whole of Pope's *Messiah* before I was fourteen, and I devoured Thomson's *Seasons* on the sly, under the impression that it was light reading, and therefore not to be dipped into by children. When I found that it wasn't stolen waters after all, the sweetness stayed by me."

"Just as I did with Rollin's *Ancient History!*" said I, eagerly.

As eagerly I rushed into the account of how I

had abstracted one volume at a time from the top shelf of the bookcase at home, and read it on the back porch out of lesson hours, thinking my father might disapprove, and not daring to tell anybody of my secret study until he surprised me one day poring over the eighth volume.

"You see"—my eyes wandering out of the window, my thoughts upon what I was saying —"he came up behind me so quietly I didn't hear him. Something made me look up, and there were his eyes looking right down into mine. There was nothing for it but to face the music, and I said, 'Father! is this light reading?' How he laughed! 'Hardly, my daughter,' said he. 'I should call it pretty deep subsoil ploughing—'"

I checked myself as if struck by a shot. Miss Barbara had been strolling up and down the room, her hands behind her, in a way peculiar to herself, listening encouragingly to my narrative, putting in an interjection here and there that helped me along. Between two words, as it were, I became conscious of a change in the spiritual atmosphere. There was a third presence

in the room. I felt that there was a difference in Miss Barbara's mental attitude. Her attention was divided. The current of magnetic sympathy was broken. In the sensitiveness of my nervous system induced by recent illness, I was, doubtless, more susceptible to such subtle influences than a normally sound girl would have been. Certain it is that an electric thrill brought me to my feet and turned me toward the door. A man stood on the threshold. That he had been there long enough to hear some part of my monologue was apparent from Miss Barbara's greeting: —

"Good evening! Come in and be introduced to the young lady who has told her story so well! Miss Molly Burwell! this is my brother-in-law, Maj' Peachy! She doesn't like to be called 'Mary,' and, indeed, 'Molly' suits her much better."

Her manner of slurring over the last syllable of his title struck me forcibly at once. It was a way married women had of naming their husbands. Our physician's wife always spoke of her spouse as "Doct' Skelton"; my own mother

ran "Mister" and "Burwell" into a composite proper noun.

This impression was born in the hundredth part of a second, but it never left me. The trick of speech was significant, and of but one thing. She might say, "My brother-in-law." Elision and intonation betrayed her.

The Major bowed solemnly, his hand upon his heart, as was the wont of gentlemen of the Old School. I courtesied timidly. He said, "Happy to make your acquaintance!" politely and listlessly. I replied, "Thank you," confusedly, and sat down again.

Another disillusion! Of late they were the warp and the woof of my life.

Mr. Frederic Sedley and I had mated this fine elderly gentlewoman, instinct with vitality to the tips of her taper fingers, with a courtly knight, stalwart as Hercules, handsome as Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, a Bayard in gallant grace, a Dunallan in piety and manly tenderness.

What I saw was a man not an inch taller than Miss Barbara, as they stood side by side. In his athletic youth he may have overtopped her

by three inches. He had settled down on his lees, that is, upon the cartilaginous pads separating the joints of the vertebræ, and shortened in stature. She had kept herself up, physically and mentally. He stooped slightly, thus diminishing his height still more; his chest was concave; his voice was husky; he was spare of frame; solicitous wisps of hair, brushed perpendicularly to their trysting-place on the exact top of his head, called attention to the bald area there, instead of masking it; he had a Roman nose; dark eyes shone dully in deep hollows under shaggy eyebrows, and I was morally certain his white teeth were not his, except by right of purchase.

The impression made upon me then, and which was strengthened by subsequent acquaintanceship, was of a man who was chronically fatigued. True, he remained standing until Miss Barbara sat down, before subsiding, like a spent wave, into an arm-chair set near the window. I knew by intuition that it was put there for him, and that he occupied it whenever he came to the house.

"Have you had a very busy day?" inquired his sister-in-law, with unfeigned interest.

"Very much so, and the weather is depressing."

"June is a trying month," responded Miss Barbara. "Dr. Haxall tells me that more Richmond children die in June than in any other six months in the year. And men are but children of a larger growth, you know, Molly. June tells upon us all."

"July is hotter!" was my banal answer.

"Yes, but less sultry. Ready, Antony?" as the butler bowed in the doorway. "We are to have supper in the summer-house, Maj'. There will be no danger of taking cold, will there?"

The Major pulled himself erect with the help of the arms of his big chair.

"Not unless the ground is damp."

The husky monotone was dissonant after her heartsome accents.

"You think of everything!" — admiringly. "Antony has laid a thick rug over the ground. No! no!" He had offered his arm to her. "Take Miss Molly. She is our invalid."

I resented the epithet in my hot, young heart, as my fingers took account of the sharp bones

within his coat-sleeve. I might be thin. I was not scrawny! The men with whom I had walked arm-in-arm heretofore — my father, my cousins, young and old, our county neighbors — had *brawn* — muscles almost as hard as the bones they covered. I shrank in actual repulsion from the skeleton member that assumed to "support" me. My spinal column stiffened; my step became elastic at the implication.

Seated at the table in the summer-house, Antony standing behind the Major's chair, and his son behind the hostess, we bowed reverent heads while the Major mumbled a grace.

"He can't speak up like a man, even to God!" commented I, mentally.

I ought not to have been disgusted or surprised at the further discovery that he was a dyspeptic, but I was, and with a superadded sense that an imputation was cast by the discovery upon my newly regained appetite — the hunger of youth and of convalescence. I partook zestfully of Smithfield ham, cut from a young pig fattened upon peanuts — a dream in tenderness and flavor, carved by Antony into translucent shavings, curl-

"SEATED AT THE TABLE IN THE SUMMER-HOUSE."

ing before the blade like rose leaves, and fairly melting upon the ravished tongue. I did not refuse cold duckling and hot "batter-bread" — another miracle of culinary skill unknown in higher latitudes — or beaten biscuits and peach mangoes. Chicken salad found favor in my eyes, and sponge cake, and red raspberries and cream. I washed all down with iced milk, and felt the better for every mouthful. There was waste to be repaired, and material for strength and growth to be provided.

The birds were chirping their vespers in the rose jungles which were masses of bloom; belated bees shook the honeysuckle bells, humming happily over their suppers; once, a dissipated humming-bird darted in at the door of the arbor, circled about a dish of honey on the table, and was off again before we could exclaim; the West was all aglow, and in the deepening calm of evening we could hear the River singing her favorite child to sleep.

Again I said to my recuperating self how good it was to be alive — especially good there — and *thus!* I could have cried in sheer ecstasy.

While I revelled, and Miss Barbara's crisp, kindly talk kept the feast from being a mere "feed," the Major crunched dry toast, ate a boiled egg with a deliberate spoon, and sipped the most attenuated tea that ever disgraced the reputation of the Celestial herb. When he said anything, his talk matched the tea. But he rarely spoke except in reply to a direct question from Miss Barbara. As a confirmed dyspeptic, it was his bounden duty to masticate thoroughly, and not to jar the digestive apparatus by mental excitement.

The strangest part of a performance which was full of novelty to me was Miss Barbara's behavior to her brother-in-law and whilom lover; her watchfulness of his every movement, her open enjoyment of his society (save the mark!), and her utter unconsciousness of what — as the French have it — jumped at the eyes for me in less than three minutes after I was introduced to him — to wit, that the man was a "stick"! No other word fitted him so well. A bit of human driftwood, sapless to the heart, and comely to nobody except to the one faithful

worshipper who would always behold in him the Has-been she learned to love in the hey-day of life.

As may be supposed, I did not find all this out that first evening. But I felt it with the spiritual antennæ that serve women in the place of logical deduction. It puzzled me to distraction. When I went to my room at my early bed-time, we — for Miss Barbara insisted upon going up "to see that I was comfortable" — left the Major lying back in his big chair by the back-parlor window that opened upon the beautiful old garden, pipe in mouth,—the picture of indolent ease. He arose to say "Good night, Miss Burwell!" as I courtesied in passing, a skinny hand tugging at the arm of the chair to aid the stiff knee-joints. Looking back from the staircase, I saw him relapse into the old attitude.

The woman I had seen in the garden with Antony was in waiting with my lighted candle in the upper hall. Miss Barbara took it from her.

"You may go to my room, Cleo, and wait until I call you," she said. "When Miss Molly is ready to be undressed, I will let you know."

I should need no help, and so I assured her. I have always had an un-English aversion to the handling of a strange maid.

"Cleo!" I repeated, when she was out of hearing. "Does that mean the Muse of History?"

"It stands for Cleopatra, the Queen of Egypt," returned Miss Barbara, gayly, "and goes with Antony. Their son is 'Augustus.' Maj' Peachy named him. The marriage of Antony and Cleopatra was, in his opinion, the righting of a great historical wrong. He has a lively appreciation of the humorous side of any question, and this marriage appealed to it. Are you sure you would not like to have her Majesty get you ready for bed? She is very quick and willing, and light on her feet, as the saying goes. Maj' Peachy quotes, — 'I saw her once hop forty paces in the public street,' when he sees her flying about the yard and garden. Here is a glass of milk and a beaten biscuit, should you be hungry, and I will put this bell on the stand by your bed. My room is next to yours, and I am a light sleeper. Should you be wakeful, or

uncomfortable in any way, don't be afraid to ring. Good night!"

As she kissed my forehead — an unusual demonstration for her — I clasped my arms about her neck, in an irresistible paroxysm of gratitude.

"*Dear* Miss Barbara! I don't see why you are so good to me! I can't help loving you, and telling you how grateful I am!"

She returned the embrace with unexpected fervor, holding me close to her, and laying her cheek to my hair. I felt her breast heave irregularly, as if with restrained emotion, but her voice was clear and merry: —

"Don't try to help it — please! It isn't every day that an old lady hears such a pretty confession from a young girl. I shall sleep the more sweetly for it. Good night, again!"

After undressing, I was too restless for bed. Instead, I extinguished the light, and, in my old fashion, curled myself up in the window-seat to look at the stars and to let Mr. Frederic Sedley out of the tabernacle. While I confided to him my disappointment and the puzzle that was a positive pain, I could hear the murmur of

voices downstairs. Whiffs from Major Peachy's pipe floated through his window up to mine, alternately with the breath of the white jessamine clambering over the back of the house. Miss Barbara did most of the talking. Now and then, she laughed out like a girl, doubtless at some fresh evidence of the Major's sense of humor. My lip curled: —

"The idea of his seeing fun in anything! And I don't begin to believe he ever read Shakespeare, much less quoted it! She said it herself, and he grunted, 'Quite so!' just as he did three times while we were at supper."

An old rhyme popped into my head. I was startled at the appositeness of the doggerel: —

"There was a lady loved a swine.
'Honey!' said she,
'Pig-hog! wilt thou be mine?'
'Hunc!' said he."

I blushed in the darkness with compunction that I could make the application in Miss Barbara's house, with her kiss warm upon my forehead.

"It was all the Major's fault!" I retorted

petulantly to Frederic's gentle rebuke. All her bright sayings, the gay good humor and cleverness that made her a favorite in her large coterie of friends, were so many pearls of great price wasted upon him — for how many years?

Cousin Molly Belle told me that he had visited regularly nowhere else since his wife died. Julia Dorman said he spent every evening with Miss Barbara. He had his bachelor apartments at the Virginia House overlooking the Capitol Square. His real home was under this old roof, in the rooms where he had wooed both of the sisters, and wedded one.

In time, when I had studied life's problems with a more humble and teachable spirit, I understood, in a degree at least, what irked me unreasonably in my window-bench cogitations. I have not lived over threescore years without seeing other women — and not a few — besides this great-hearted creature, waste, or so it seemed to others, their best years and choicest gifts of heart and intellect in serving tables in the temples of idols so ignoble that the world cried out upon the profanation.

With all her strong, shrewd sense, Miss Barbara had her ideals. She had merged the fairest of these in the real personality of one man. He was handsome, blithe, and gallant in the season of youth and love. She had carried forward in her deathless youth the glamour of that blessèd time. When the desire of the recreant lover's eyes was taken away from him at a stroke, and he turned to Barbara for consolation, she became his stay and comfort as whole-souledly as she had plighted her troth to him when both were free. The sorrow he could not live down was but another virtue in the eyes of her who had been as a mother to his beautiful wife. If she had idealized him in the early flush of her love, she glorified him now.

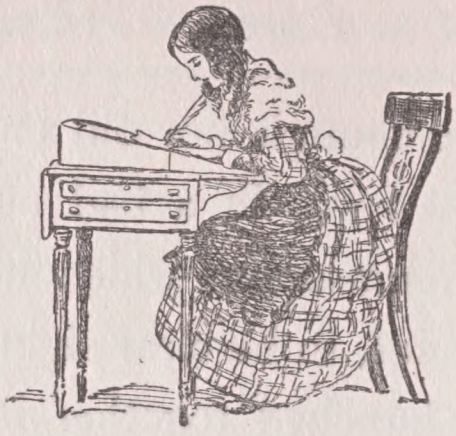
I hope I am not tedious in my attempt to make of a paradox a rational conclusion, to prove an anomaly natural and reasonable. I know no other way of accomplishing this than by setting truths side by side, and working upward from the axiom that fact never contradicts fact.

As I have said, I gathered little of this that night, and that in vague shadowings of what I

was neither wise enough nor old enough to grasp in its entirety. I was in a bad humor, and too rebellious at circumstances which had thrown my dream out of joint, to be clear sighted or judicial.

While I sat hunched together in the window-seat, my arms clasping my knees, and my head bent upon them, Miss Barbara went to the piano and began to play. Cousin Molly Belle had told me, as a notable exception to the practice of most elderly women, how Miss Allen had kept up her music. I divined, in an instant, as the swift fingers swept the keys, that she had "kept it up" for the sake of this — "dyspeptic *atomy!*"

I spat it out angrily, ran across the room, tumbled into bed, and, despite the heat of the June night, covered my head with a pillow to muffle the waltzes and marches and sonatas played for the honored guest while he lay back in his elbow-chair and smoked the pipe of indolence.



Chapter VII

I make a Holocaust

"Beat all your feathers as flat down as pancakes!"

—Old Play.

"MY daughter! how uncomfortable you look!"

I started up, nervously, at my mother's voice, and huddled my papers into an open portfolio.

In reality I was exceedingly comfortable. An August storm was howling outside of my gabled room; sheets of rain blurred the panes of the dormer-window in which my desk was recessed. Ever since I was old enough to notice whether the weather were fair or foul, the foulest has been the fairest in my estimation. My spirits mount as the barometer falls. This was the second day of fierce tempest, a mad, sweeping rain that kept man and beast under shelter. Soon after break-

fast I had escaped from the party of guests of assorted ages downstairs and settled myself for the enjoyment of a forenoon after my own taste.

The windows had been opened while the beds were in making, and the air was bleak. I tied a knotted worsted shawl over my shoulders, knotting it behind; drew a pair of woollen bedside slippers over my feet which always got cold while I was writing; unclasped a baggy portfolio, my sole confidante in the stolen joys of rainy weather orgies with the muses, and forthwith, "the world forgetting," was "by the world forgot."

Except by my mother. At twelve o'clock I was still an absentee from the family circle and she came to look me up. Gravity was in every lineament; disapproval in eye and voice. One glance took in the details of my costume and environment.

Mary 'Liza and I shared the room between us. A blind man would have known by instinct which side was mine and which hers. Our beds were precisely alike. The same maid took care of them. We had bureaux of the same size and

pattern. Mary 'Liza's mirror was tipped at the correct angle; her pincushion was in the exact middle of the marble slab under the glass; on one side of it were a cologne bottle and a gilt vase. On the other side her Bible, *Village Hymns*, and a red morocco copy of *Daily Food* were piled primly, the Bible, as the largest book, at the bottom, *Daily Food* on top. The rest of her portable and personal property was put away out of sight in the bureau drawers, and in her half of our roomy clothes-press.

I had no cologne bottle and no vase. A hang-bird's nest swung above the mirror which canted crazily as I had tilted it to see if my frock were too short. I was stretching out of all my clothes. A riding-whip, a present from Cousin Frank Morton, dangled jauntily from one of the up-rights that held the looking-glass; a neck-ribbon from the other. Mary 'Liza kept her brush and comb in one of the short top-drawers. I wanted to have mine where I could snatch them up without loss of time. Therefore, they were in conspicuous evidence atop of the books and magazines which filled every inch of available

space on the bureau. Mary 'Liza's books were stacked symmetrically at the far side of a writing-table under the window in her territory. I had not room for books upon my desk in the dormer. My turgid portfolio, my stone inkstand, — a ponderous affair that held a pint; penwipers, sand-box, two wooden scrap-boxes with lids lettered respectively, "*Victoria Spool Thread*," and "*Toilet Soap*," gave little liberty for elbow-play.

My mother's eyes returned to me, and mine fell guiltily. I stood convicted of disorderly habits and wasted time.

"Sit down, Molly!" said my mentor, mild with all her firmness. "It grieves me to be obliged to find fault with you, as if you were still a little girl and not almost a young lady. But you are forming habits now for a lifetime, and I am responsible for them while you are under age. Have you ever asked yourself if it is not selfish and impolite for you to sit up here, writing and reading half the day while there is company in the house to be entertained? You owe something to society and to your family. Already people begin to speak of you as 'unsociable,' and

'conceited,' and 'a blue stocking.' If you could live all your life in your ideal world, there might be some propriety in cultivating the habit of learned seclusion. As a sensible, God-fearing girl, who has to do her part in a commonplace home, you owe a duty to those with whom you associate. It would break my heart to see you grow up into a literary woman, daughter — a *précieuse ridicule!*"

Her voice shook, and the moisture glistened in the dear eyes. My heart swelled in seeing these.

"I don't mean to be selfish, mother," I faltered, "and there are so many people downstairs they don't need me."

"How do you know that, my dear? They are your old playfellows and my friends, and must have some things in common with even so studious a young lady as yourself."

The slight suspicion of sarcasm in her accent put me on my mettle.

"How do I know, mother? Because I *bore* them and they bore me! When the Pemberton girls and Paulina Hobson are not talking about beaux

and clothes and other people's business, they are comparing notes over this and that crochet stitch. If you knew how I hate the sight of a crochet-needle and the everlasting balls of cotton and yarn, you wouldn't blame me for liking to get off by myself with a book, now and then!"

"Suppose Mary 'Liza and myself felt in the same way, and acted as we felt?" She was a gentle soul, but had convictions and the courage born of them. "A very good rule for daily living is not to do that which would break up the foundations of society and make home miserable if everybody did it!"

She had struck straight. I sat silent, my hands in my lap, my head drooping. Each of the five smooth stones from the brook of Common Sense had hit the mark.

I made one futile stir of protest: —

"If everybody did nothing but crochet tidies and work lamp-mats and knit shawls and hoods — what then?"

"I did not say that you should do nothing but try to make your father's house pleasant for the family, and for our visitors, Molly. Every

duty has its place and time. And a woman's first duty — next to that she owes to God, of course — is to her family and to her home. I am afraid that you, my dear little girl, are in imminent danger of forgetting this. Education should enlarge, not narrow the sympathies. Eccentricity is a sign of weakness somewhere. Those who plume themselves upon being unlike those about them could usually learn much from those they despise. It takes a high order of common sense to render one willing to seem commonplace rather than make commonplace people uncomfortable.

"I didn't come up here to lecture the dear daughter who is learning much more from books and teachers than her mother ever had the opportunity of getting. But out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, you know, and a mother's heart is all the time full to overflowing. I am afraid you will take cold this damp day, writing here. This room is on the north side of the house, and the high wind finds its way in. You had better call Marthy to make a fire for you. That is" — and this with-

out a touch of irony — "unless you will enliven our circle downstairs by joining us?"

"I'll be down presently," I said dully.

She knew me too well to seem to notice tone or downcast looks.

"This is a snug corner!" she observed, rising, and glancing about her. "I don't wonder you find it a temptation." And, looking out of the window, "I really believe it is storming harder than ever! Be sure to have a fire made if you stay here."

I held my head up until the sound of her steps died away on the stairs. Then I laid it down upon the bulging portfolio and cried — I was about to say, "like a baby," but such a wash of passionate brine would drown out a baby's life. My heart emptied itself into the channel of that outbreak.

The first words I could form betrayed the spring of grief: —

"I might have known I was too happy to be left alone! It could not last!"

July, the first month of my vacation, was in the retrospect, a *chiaro-oscuro* of much sleeping

and little else. I was growing fast; the school term had taxed my mental forces severely, and the nervous collapse of May and June left traces that were not gone by July. By Dr. Haxall's advice, privately conveyed to my parents through the Mortons, I was suffered to sleep as many hours of the twenty-four as pleased me, and to "laze" while I seemed awake. I cared little for walking, less for riding, and, apparently, nothing for books. Intellect lay fallow; physical recuperation was slow. By the first of August I shook myself free of lethargy and bounded into the arena of active existence, refreshed by the new wine of Nature's choicest vintage. The blessèd Old Mother had made me over while I lay, sleeping and waking, in her arms. I laid hold of life with both hands and with all my heart. Full-fledged, with the dew of its youth upon it, a scheme, cherished fondly for several months, the fulfilment of which had been postponed for lack of time, came to the front.

I would write a Book! The sixth chapter, half-finished, lay before me, when my mother's voice recalled me to the actual scene and season.

I was writing a story of real life — the life I, or any other flesh-and-blood Virginia girl, might lead. I would take counsel with no one as to characters and plot, and accept no model in style and treatment. My brain-child should be all mine own. Of course — and herein was sweetness beyond compare — Mr. Frederic Sedley was to be the hero.

My tears were literally dripping from the leather back of the fat portfolio as I opened it, and took thence the unfinished chapter, re-read it, as one lingers in looking his last upon the belovèd dead, and laid it by with those which had preceded it, in decent, mournful order. Next, one by one, I extracted from the bowels of the big portfolio sketches in prose; fragments of verse; finished and polished-off poems — each thought of my thought, heart of my heart. Even in the sincerity of my sorrow — and I have known none more real — a quotation arose to my lips and passed them: —

"Dear as the ruddy drops
That visit this sad heart!"

How sad, I cannot let myself say after the

lapse of half a century. How torn and racked the smiling reader would not believe.

No human eye save mine had read sketch or verse. I shrank from confiding the fact of their existence to my closest intimate. Dread of the obloquy of which my mother had spoken as attached to the literary woman may have entered into my excessive shyness and the absolute terror with which I contemplated the possibility of discovery. Until my darling scheme of authorship was fully ripe, the secret should remain with me. I like to recollect that my intention throughout was to tell my father, first, of my ambition and what I had done to prove it. I had named my story *Alone*. In the fulness of times and seasons, if God would mercifully grant to my labor and desire this crowning glory, I would go to him with the completed manuscript in my hand and say: —

"Father! I have written a book! I hope it is good enough to publish. May I read it to you, and let you judge whether it is or not?"

In the fulness of God's time and way, the dream and the longing blossomed into fruition.

But (again and yet again!) that is another story!

I am living over now that August noon, gloomy with clouds and boisterous with gusty rain, when a slip of a girl, chilled to the bone, and heartsick almost unto death, made ready her papers for the burning. I read each — and there were scores of them — rapidly, but none the less lovingly. At last but one lay on my right, and the pile on the left was as high as my shoulders as I sat. It was a sheet of common copy-book paper, — creased and yellow.

In unfolding it I laughed mirthlessly. Then I could hardly see the pencilled lines for tears. "*An Ode*" was written at the top of the page in the "coarse-hand" script of an eight-year-old child. What had happened to me yesterday was not more distinct in my memory than the circumstances under which I penned my very first "poem."

A tall, lush plant, known as "The Bride," bearing queer, scentless, green-and-white blossoms, grew in my mother's flower borders. A child broke off a spray, and, seeing a milky sap

exuding from the stem, rubbed it upon the back of his hand. Next day, the hand was covered with an eruption resembling measles.

That afternoon, in passing, I saw the whole clump drooping to the roots, as if smitten by a deadly blight. Inspiration gat hold of me. *Something* awoke in my brain and ran like fire through my veins. When called to supper I could not eat. As soon as I could get away from the table I was back in the garden, pacing the paths with burning cheeks and clay-cold hands, ever returning to the blighted plant, now ghostly in the twilight; rhymes forming themselves in my head through no volition of mine. At midnight I stole out of bed, struck a light, carried it down into the dining room lest my cousin should awake, cleared off a corner of the table laid for breakfast, and — a comical little figure in nightgown and cap — scratched down the rough draught of the "Ode." Beneath this title was scrawled: —

"*Addressed to a plant called 'The Bride,' which was found dying shortly after it was discovered to be Poisonous.*"

The first declaration of affection, the first kiss of love, or the first tall silk hat may be forgotten by woman or by man. The poet — would-be, or real — never loses the exact memory of his first-born poem; or the author the recollection of how his written words looked in print at his first reading of them. A half-century and more have passed since my eyes rested upon that dingy sheet covered with sprawling pencillings. I can repeat, *verbatim*, my earliest effort at rhyme and measure. That is a misuse of the word "effort." The travail of composition was spontaneous, and a rapture, rather than an agony. But to the lines: —

> "Alack, my pretty, graceful Bride!
> Why dost thou hang thy pretty head?
> Is't because of poisonous fumes
> Which round thee thou hast shed?
> Alack, my pretty, dainty Bride!
> Well may'st thou hang thy pretty head,
> To-morrow morn when I come here
> I shall find thee drooping — dead!"

It is almost superfluous to add that I had committed to memory, at my mother's suggestion

and from her well-worn copy of her favorite poet, Cowper's —

> "The rose that was washed — newly washed by the shower
> Which Mary to Anna conveyed,
> The plentiful moisture encumbered the flower
> And weighed down its beautiful head."

My maiden Ode was unconsciously founded upon that famous morceau of wishy-washy verse. Obedient to my exemplar, I esteemed it a necessity and a solemn obligation to affix a moral to my rhyme. What Cowper and Æsop did, and tutors and governors approved, must be right. It soothes my self-respect to reflect that this same moral — the tail to my soaring kite — was the one section of the production that "came hard." I hammered it out conscientiously, and did not like it when it was made fast to the body of the effusion.

Above it I wrote "MORAL," in true goody-goody fashion: —

> "Now, children! learn a moral here.
> N'er show your passions bad,
> Or you will find, eftsoon, too late
> That mercy cannot then be had."

That the piteous little prig and Puritan, who now re-read the doggerel between tears and smiles, was as ignorant of the quality of mercy as of the "passions bad" that make mercy the crying need of the Human, signified less than naught to me in those callow days.

I laughed again when I got to "eftsoon."

"I borrowed it from the 'Ancient Mariner,' no doubt," I commented aloud. "It's poor trash — that Ode, but I was happy while composing it. I shall never be so well satisfied with anything else I write." My tone sharpened. "After this, I shall write nothing but letters. My dream is past! Be it so!"

I heaped the hoarded treasures in the chimney-place, and applied a match. The fire bit at them with cruel greediness; the flames, beaten this way and that, by the winds blowing up and down the throat of the chimney, made quick work of the funeral pyre. I thought of Abraham and Isaac, of Jephthah's daughter, and of Agamemnon and Iphigenia. My mother had bidden me make a Holocaust of my offspring. I had obeyed.

She had counselled me, even with tears, to transform myself into a commonplace girl, to crucify and to bury my Ideals. In this, too, I would be obedient. With never a misgiving that an unholy temper and morbid and wilful misconstruction of her motives and words were at the bottom of my resolution, I contrived other and ingenious methods of self-immolation. The love of dramatic effect must be a component part of my nature. It prompted me now to gather up the smoking tinder in the shovel, bear it carefully to the window on Mary 'Liza's side of the room, and "fling it to the winds of heaven!" Suggestions of Wyckliffe's ashes committed to the Severn, and borne by the river to the sea, strayed into my turbulent musings. Three black flakes fluttered back upon Mary 'Liza's table. In picking them up I left smudges upon the starched white cover. I said sullenly that I would not account for them when questioned. It was an offence to my sense of justice and right that she should go through life unwounded and reputable, while I was buffeted and besmirched.

I took off the brown calico and the white apron I had worn all the morning; rearranged my hair, which was curling kinkily in the dampness that converted the bandeaux of the Pemberton sisters and Paulina Hobson's lint-white corkscrew curls into stringy wisps. From the wardrobe I took a freshly laundered rose-colored lawn and put it on. My best black silk apron, embroidered upon the pockets and on each corner with wild roses, was none too fine for the everyday wear of the pattern damsel into which the "blue stocking" (I convicted Paulina in my mind of that spiteful fling!) and the "*précieuse ridicule*" was to be transmogrified.

Lastly, I hunted up my long-neglected work-bag and tripped sedately down the stairs.

"The chamber" was a spacious room. A sofa had stood under the high mantel in warm weather. It had been wheeled aside to-day, to make way for the wood fire blazing on the hearth, and stood at an obtuse angle to the chimney-piece. My mother's workstand and rocking-chair were opposite, near the western window. Mrs. Hobson, a second-cousin-in-law,

was next to her; Miss Judy Spencer, Mrs. Hobson's sister, was in another rocking-chair, facing the fire. Mary 'Liza was between the elder ladies and the three girls who occupied the sofa. My mother was sewing; Mrs. Hobson was knitting; all the others were crocheting. Seven pairs of eyes watched my entrance.

It was Paulina Hobson who cried pertly,—"My! how fine somebody does look!"

I smiled civilly and conventionally, and crossed over to Miss Judy. She was the most commonplace person I ever knew, or ever expected to know. Her hair was drab-colored; her dress was of almost the same shade; her eyes were pale-blue; she wore a wide, crocheted collar, and narrow, crocheted cuffs; the handkerchief, lying half open on her lap, was edged with fine crocheted lace. All were of her own make.

I pulled up a low chair to her side.

"I have come to take my first lesson in crocheting," I said, respectfully. "I couldn't have a better teacher."

Had the devil of contrariness been less triumphantly in possession of me, I must have

been touched by the gratified affection in my mother's smile, and the alacrity with which she opened a drawer in her workstand (*I* have it now!) and produced a crochet-hook and a ball of cotton.

"Here are your tools, daughter!" tender encouragement in every tone. "You will have an apt pupil, Miss Judy. There is nothing Molly cannot learn when she gives her mind to it."

Chapter VIII

Marion

"Comes in my father —
And, like the tyrannous breathings of the north,
Shakes all our buds from blowing."

— *Cymbeline.*

THREE days were given to the pursuit of dead-level commonplaceness. They would have been insufferable days had not the genius of self-torture — beloved by all women, and an integral part of my make-up — held me sternly to the task. The exhibition would have been ridiculous to lookers-on if any of them had had the remotest suspicion of what I was bent upon. I

crocheted diligently; I imitated the Pembertons' inanities and Paulina Hobson's giggle; I chattered about nothings and exclaimed at less than nothings. I paid much attention to my clothes, and had my maid dress my hair in the latest mode. I even practised the Grecian bend, then in vogue with advanced fashionists.

The day that I put this on, my father took hold of my shoulders and drew them back until the blades collided.

"Mother! this child is getting crooked. She is outgrowing her strength!"

Paulina's green eyes gleamed with malicious glee, and her chuckle was as the crackling of thorns under a pot. She knew the Grecian bend when she saw it, and really believed that I was aping the carriage of the fine lady in good earnest.

She did it twenty times a week. Why not every girl?

That same day my father drew his brows into a horseshoe on his forehead in a way each of his children had had reason to know to his or her cost. The occasion now was my silly reply to a sensible remark made by Mrs. Hobson.

"What has got into you lately, Molly?" he asked sharply. "I don't know you for my child!"

"It's a wise father who knows his own child!" retorted I, flippantly, but with no thought of any equivocal meaning until I saw my mother's look of pained surprise, and my father's deepened frown, and heard the choked gurgle which signified that Paulina was stuffing her handkerchief into her mouth — an unseemly habit of hers in our governess days, as I well remembered. She had a badly soiled imagination — that girl!

I had not, if I must do myself justice, and I had the grace to color painfully at the luckless slip of a tongue that was clean, if sometimes lawless.

Had not the aforenamed demon of perversity been in rampant occupancy, I must have noticed with repentant shame the sad perplexity in my mother's eyes when they rested upon me during my most unworthy and self-imposed novitiate. Too honest of purpose, herself, to surmise that my caricature of the girl of the period was a deliberate insult to her, her tender heart held her

back from telling me that the part was overdone. She did go so far as to intimate to me that the new style of wearing my hair, which was purposely exaggerated upon my foolish head, was "hardly as becoming to me as the old way."

"It's the latest agony!" I said, airily. "Let us be genteel if we die for it!"

My father was within hearing.

"The latest agony!" he repeated, the horseshoe again in evidence. "Slang may be compatible with what you call 'gentility' in a city boarding-school. It is not tolerated in my house. I thought you knew that, Molly!"

I knew it as well as I comprehended that I was doing my best to punish my mother for the lecture that had provoked me to destroy the hoarded treasures of years. In the recollection I hardened my heart against her and reason.

How long I could and would have kept up the pitiable farce was not to be put to the test. The Pembertons and Hobsons went home one morning, and on the afternoon of the same day Marion Cunningham arrived to pay me a long-promised visit. I say "me," for Mary 'Liza had gone

home with the Pembertons for a week's stay. Moreover, Marion had always been my particular friend, although nearer Mary 'Liza's age than mine.

She was now seventeen, and the most beautiful girl in the county, as many others besides myself thought. Her hair was dark brown, with brighter shades flashing in and among the natural curls; her mouth was exquisite in shape and color, her complexion pure pink and white, and her eyes were large, dark, and soft. "Sweetest eyes were ever seen," is the phrase which comes to me when I recall their liquid radiance,—the pure spirit, the loving, tender heart that looked from them.

"They are so deep I feel that I could drown in them!" I had once said to my cousin, Dick Carter.

"It would be a glorious death!" he answered, very unexpectedly to me.

(We will come to that presently.)

In Mary 'Liza's absence Marion and I slept together. The night was warm, and the harvest moon was bright. The room was full of the scent of honeysuckles climbing up the walls, and

of lilies lining the garden walks, and we talked until midnight, lying peacefully and happily high upon our pillows.

Marion had been educated at home by governesses, and lately by a young clergyman who had married her elder sister in July, and taken her to Norfolk to live. Marion told me all about the wedding, and how happy the newly wedded pair were in their neat parsonage. She had been her sister's first bridesmaid. There were seven bridesmaids and seven groomsmen.

"Dick Carter walked with you, didn't he?" asked I, carelessly.

Dick was one of my favorite cousins, not merely because he was Cousin Molly Belle's brother, and because he was a nice boy, good-looking, bright, and the best company in the world, but he had always been kind and attentive to me — a slip of a girl who neither danced nor flirted. He was twenty-two years old; he had taken his degree at the University, and was going to Philadelphia very soon to complete a course of study in Jefferson Medical College. He and Marion Cunningham and I had been chums ever

since I could recollect. Her mother was Uncle Carter's sister, so he was Marion's first cousin, although she was not related by blood to me, a distinction of which we made little account in Old Virginia.

The moonlight was so clear that I saw a scarlet cloud sweep over the face upon the other pillow, as I put the careless question, and I wondered at it — for a minute.

Then Marion raised a thick lock of hair in her hand, and held it between her face and the flood of rays pouring across the bed from the window, letting the strands fall slowly through her fingers, as in idle play. The motion was instinctive and natural. She never posed, or "pretended" anything.

"Yes," she said tranquilly. "I couldn't go in with one of my brothers, and he and Mr. Tyrrell are great friends. He studied with Mr. Tyrrell for two vacations, you know."

I pushed my parallels a little further, for a thought had popped into my restless brain.

"Is he as nice as ever? I haven't seen him in six months."

"Oh, yes! Father says he is one of the finest fellows he ever knew, and that he is sure to make a name and place for himself. Some people think it odd that Kate should marry our tutor. But we are sure she could not have made a better choice. I wish you could have seen her in her wedding-dress! She was so pretty and happy, and so self-possessed! You felt in looking at her that she had made no mistake. Mr. Tyrrell looked remarkably well, too. He is a graceful, dignified man, always, but bridegrooms are often ill at ease, — I can't imagine why."

The thought was born, and it was a conviction. I had not meant Mr. Tyrrell, and Marion was not stupid. Nor had I ever heard her talk away from a subject until now. She was tactfully ready to follow others' lead. Dick was in love with her, and she knew it! Not as much in love with her as Mr. Frederic Sedley would be with me, some day, when the tabernacle was opened for good and all. These two had been boy and girl together, — almost like brother and sister, — and there would be none of the reserves of comparative strangerhood to break down, a

process which promised sweet and infinite possibilities to my imagination. "Getting acquainted" would be delightsome beyond compare — the discovery, day by day, of some new charm of character, some hidden depth of feeling, some mine of intellectual wealth hitherto unsuspected. A shade of regret stole into the pleasure with which the undeveloped woman caught at the suggestion of a love-story.

"Now," resumed Marion, perhaps struck by my silence, "tell me about your school and all you have been doing since Christmas. How long ago it seems! Cousin Molly Belle told mother what a good student you are."

She had the inborn knack of praising truthfully. Fair and goodly things floated to her by spiritual gravitation. She had the rarer faculty of inviting confidence, and the gift of healing that does not invariably accompany it.

I had not been able to talk with my mother of my broken friendship with Sidney Page and the humiliating episode of my compromising association with Julia Dorman. I would have shrunk from the gentlest catechism as from a spatter of

vitriol upon the bare skin. Before I knew what I was doing, I poured the tale into Marion's ear, omitting no harrowing detail. I was an hour in telling it. When the recital was ended, I was shaking in a paroxysm of tearless sobs, and as cold as if the night had been in January, and not in August.

She wound her soft, tender arms about me, laid her lips to my cheek, and comforted me with cooing words, before she essayed comment upon what she had heard. Her sympathy was all with me, and she gave it in royal measure. The rest of the actors were mere puppets, pushed aside that she might the more easily get at me and pour oil and wine into wounds which were bleeding afresh. She was far from being brilliant; she was not even very clever. She was simply all-womanly, with a heart that always responded — a harp that was always in tune — to another's sorrow, and yearned to assuage that sorrow. And she saw that my grief was great — even yet.

At half-past twelve my mother tapped at our door.

"Dear children! this is not right! You should have been asleep hours ago. You will have all of to-morrow in which to talk. I am afraid you will bring pale cheeks down to breakfast with you, if not a headache apiece."

She was a true prophet so far as Marion was concerned. She ate little breakfast, but drank a cup of coffee thirstily, "hoping it would relieve her headache."

"Indeed, Cousin Mary," — as my mother exclaimed distressfully at my thoughtlessness in having kept my guest awake so late, — "that had nothing to do with it! I have had headaches almost constantly for a fortnight. I had a chill, too, last week. I reckon it is what Mammy Rachel calls 'a tech o' nager 'n' fever.' The change of air will do me great good. Uncle John Carter makes father almost angry by insisting that this part of the county is more healthy than the river lands. Our lowgrounds have been overflowed so much this summer that we have had more sickness than usual."

Her face was colorless while she made cheerful talk; her sweet lips were so dry and drawn that

my mother gave her no peace until she bundled her off to bed about eleven o'clock. Marion protested bravely to the last that nothing ailed her except "one of her bad headaches."

"I inherit them from mother," she added, when she was laid between linen sheets, the room darkened, and my maid, Rose, posted without the door to keep the hall quiet. "I often tell her that, when she has so many good things she could have given me, it is a pity she passed her headaches on to me. I'm sure I'll sleep this one off in a few hours. Thank you all for being so good to me!"

She was sleeping still at dinner-time, and Marthy, the nurse, *par éminence*, of the plantation, decreed that she should not be disturbed.

"I been know them headaches of old," she uttered. "Her Mar — Miss Catherine — been had jes' the same kind. An' wuss! I been see her jes' straight, outright deestracted with 'um for two days at a time. Ef so be Miss Mar'on ken sleep 'tel the pain w'ar itself out, it's the bes' thing."

By the time dinner was over, Dick Carter rode

up to the door to make us a formal call. He was to set out for Philadelphia next day. He did not say in so many words that he had not known Marion was with us until we mentioned it, but he let us infer as much from his manner. He, too, treated her headache as a matter of no moment, although he expressed decent regrets.

By and by he proposed that I should walk down to the Old Orchard with him.

"I am 'just a-honin'' for a sweeting apple," — this to my mother. "I mean to fill my pockets and take some to Philadelphia with me. I shan't taste anything else so good until I come back. One of the first things I can recollect is stuffing my pockets with the Burwell sweetings. Father says ours are the same. They don't taste like yours. Heigho!"

"A sigh to the memory of departing joys?" queried I, when he said "Heigho!" again.

We were going down the middle walk of the garden, at the foot of which lay the Old Orchard.

"Yes! How did you know?"

"Because you look so woebegone. Are you homesick already?"

"Yes — and no! I'll tell you all about it presently, Molly."

Not a word more spake he until we were in the natural arbor, twenty feet across, made by the "big sweeting." The ground was strewn with windfalls. Dick kicked them right and left to clear a place on the turf for us to sit upon. The grass was lush and clean, the ground dry. Three days of August suns had made quick work of the August rainfalls.

"Who would think that we had had a two-days' storm less than a week ago?" said I, by way of saying something, for Dick sat with his legs straight out before him on the ground, seemingly engrossed in picking up apples, inspecting them minutely to see they were of uniform size until he had a handful, then shying them at the tree nearest to the giant sweeting.

The action and his air of abstraction carried my thoughts back to the Saturday afternoon at the City Spring when Sidney Page threw pebbles at the thirsty robin. My heart lurched sickeningly.

Dick suspended operations for a moment.

"Ah, yes!" he snarled. "I spent those two rainy days at Rhysdale; the first in heaven, the second in *hell!*"

His handsome face was not pleasant to see as he said it. I recoiled in angry horror.

"Dick Carter!"

"I mean it, Molly Burwell! and more! I brought you down here because I must talk to somebody, or — *strangle!* And she is mighty fond of you. I suppose she has told you all about it, before now?" — glaring suspiciously at me out of the corner of his eye. "Your mother says you two were gabbling last night until all hours."

I arose to the occasion, manning all the forces at my command: —

"If you mean Marion Cunningham, she has not mentioned your name. I asked her if you stood up with her at the wedding. She said 'Yes,' and began at once to tell me what a splendid fellow her brother-in-law is. It does not occur to you, I suppose, that you might have suffered by the contrast?"

If he were savage, I could be satirical.

The shaft fell short.

"There it is!" A fusillade of apples of all sizes pelted an inoffensive trunk a rod distant. "Kate is welcome to marry a pedagogue parson of no particular pedigree, and no looks to boast of, and because I happen to be a gentleman of his own blood who means to make something of myself in my profession, if I live, — and marry the right woman, — I am sent about my business when I ask his consent to my engagement to his second daughter! It isn't *just!* It isn't fair! and if he hadn't been Marion's father, I would have told him so to his face!"

"Dick Carter!" Astonishment robbed me of other words.

"That's my name! and if there is a more wretched devil this side of purgatory, — or a hotter place, — I don't want to see him!"

"Isn't this a sudden notion?" I blundered.

He looked as if he would like to fling me after the apples. He had picked up so many that he had to lean far to each side in order to reach more. Reach them he must — apparently.

"*Sudden!* when she's the one and only girl

I have ever cared to look at a second time, since she could run alone! If I have courted her once, I've courted her seventy times seven! In fact, my life has been one long courtship. I've begged her like a hound-dog begs for a bone; I've pretended I didn't care a continental *damn* for her; I've been merry with her, and more times I've been miserable with her — and she's been an angel through it all. And, last Wednesday, when it was raining hardest and we had the parlor to ourselves for the better part of the day, — making believe playing chess, for a blind, — I coaxed and prayed her into saying — never mind what! *That* was the day I was in heaven! As I was going away so soon, and neither of us is a friend to underhand measures, I went to her father like a man, and — *that's* the day I entered hell! I've been there ever since! O Lord!"

So few missiles were within the sweep of his long arms that he stopped the firing — much to my relief.

"I certainly am mighty sorry for you!" said I, in genuine distress. "And I must say I don't understand why Mr. Cunningham behaves so.

I should think regard for his daughter's happiness would induce him to take the matter into consideration, at least."

"Said he was consulting her best good," muttered Dick, gloomily. "Had no objection to me, personally. Clean papers and all that. If I belonged to another family, and if Marion were two years older, he'd decide differently. Talked like a mournful Dutch uncle! Confound his premises and conclusions!"

"Another family! Why, it's his own!"

"Molly Burwell! what are you dreaming about? Haven't I been telling you for the past hour that *that* is the insuperable obstacle? My revered uncle has got a maggot — some hundreds of them, in fact — in his brain about the sin — think of that! the positive *iniquity* of the marriage of first cousins! Ah! you *can* see a thing when it's an inch from your nose — can you?" for an ejaculation had escaped me.

"I hadn't thought of it until this minute," said I, "but I've heard him talk about that with my father. *He* thinks just as Mr. Cunningham

does. He says it is almost as wrong for first cousins to marry as for brothers and sisters."

"Gammon and poppycock! As if Uncle Cunningham's first wife was not his second cousin, and his second wife — Marion's mother — his double first! If I were in his place, I'd be consistent before sitting in judgment upon other people."

He ground the heel of his boot into the turf until I could not help thinking of a bull pawing up the earth.

"Perhaps" — I essayed to be judicial as memory, refreshed, brought back scraps of the arguments used by the two fathers — "Perhaps that is one reason of his opposition. I recollect perfectly that he spoke of those intermarriages in talking with father. He said they were not the first in his family, and that there was insanity in some branch of it, because there had been intermarriages for several generations."

I was recollecting so fast now that I hurried on, tactlessly, forgetting what interest my listener must have in the revelation: —

"Mr. Cunningham showed father a table he

had made out, calculating exactly the chances his grandchildren would have of escaping insanity. The odds are against them, should there be any more marriages between near relations."

I broke off short at sight of his face, where incredulity and disgust struggled for mastery.

"*Well!* I will say — even if one of them *is* your father and the other my uncle, and Marion's respectable parent — that they might have chosen a topic more fit for the ears of a young lady! And I confess, — since frankness is the order of the day, — I am a *leetle* surprised at your repeating their choice calculations to me. As a cousin and a physician, I advise you not to enlarge upon the subject in mixed companies."

I got up in a towering passion. For the second time in a week I had been accused, inferentially, of indelicacy, and his taunt stung. My repetition of Mr. Cunningham's statistics was entirely impersonal. He may have included in his calculation the probable risks of marriages between his daughters and his sister's sons. I could not recollect how this was. The impertinent assumption on Dick's part that I had

alluded to this was a gross affront. He was on his feet, too, as red with rage as I was white.

"We will say 'Good-by' here and now, if you please!" I said in a tone of awful calmness. "I am going to the house alone. You can stay and fill your pockets with sweetings. I hope you will have a pleasant journey. With regard to Mr. Cunningham's objections to you as a son-in-law, I have more sympathy with him than I had a few minutes ago. It is natural for him to wish that his daughters should marry *gentlemen!*"

He overtook me at the garden fence, although I walked fast. He caught my hands in a vicelike grasp from which I could not wrench them; his lips were twitching; white dots came and went in his nostrils. I stood stock-still when I could not extricate my hands. Struggling was undignified. My passion was not spent, whatever might be said of his. I looked fearlessly into his eyes as he tried to articulate and the words would not come.

"Brute force?" I said cuttingly. "Consistency is a jewel!"

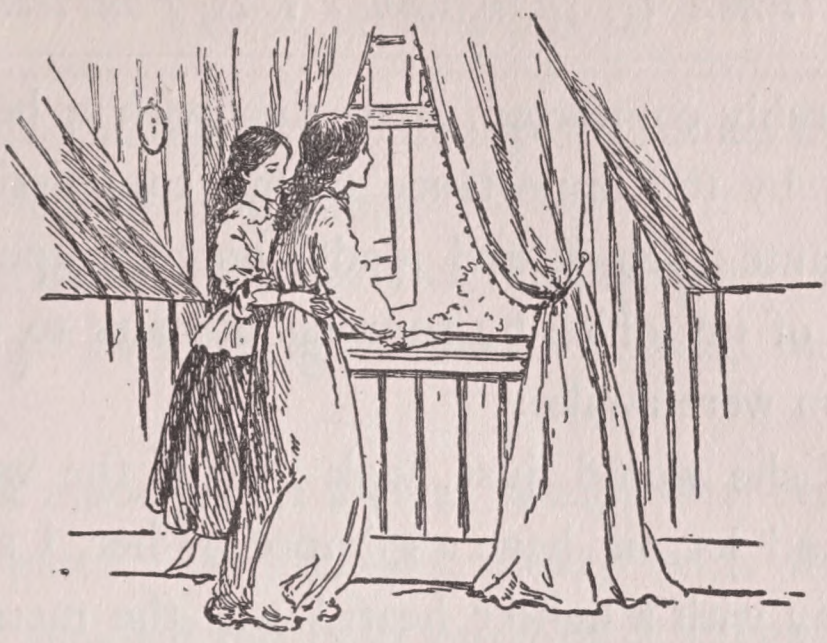
"For Heaven's sake, Molly, *don't!*" burst forth the poor boy. He was hardly more. "I know I am a brute — and a cowardly brute at that! I ought to be tied up for nine-and-thirty! I beg your pardon, but I don't deserve to be forgiven. Can't you see that I am fairly crazy? Have you no pity for a fellow who has lost everything dearest to him and who is beaten and desperate? She sent me away without one ray of hope. She told me she could not disobey her father; that I must never think of her again except as a cousin. And she *meant* it, Molly — every syllable of it! When she is convinced that a thing is right, she will do that thing if it leads her to the stake. I haven't known her all her life, and not found that out. I came here to-day, like a mean-spirited cur, to get a last look at her blessèd face. When I found that I couldn't have it, I couldn't go without asking you — her dear friend — to pity me and to talk to her about me while I am away — maybe to write to me — now and then, and let me know something about her.

"And now, — like the double-distilled *donkey*,

the contemptible puppy, I am, — I have set *you* against me, too!"

He let fall the hands he was bruising cruelly, dropped his head upon the top-rail of the fence, and sobbed outright.

He was just twenty-two years old!



Chapter IX

The Blessèd Damozel

"The blessèd damozel leaned out
From the gold bar of heaven ;
Her eyes were deeper than the depth
Of waters stilled at even ;
She had three lilies in her hand,
And the stars in her hair were seven."

— *Rossetti.*

I WILL not go into the particulars of a making-up as whole-hearted as our quarrel had been. Dick and I strolled to the house together, arranging details of a correspondence in which he was to ask all the questions he wished to ask, and I was to answer them fully. I was

measurably comforted at parting with a belovèd cousin by the importance of my commission as confidante-in-chief, and gladly entered upon the duties of my office by running upstairs to see if Marion were awake.

"If she would just look out of the window once and let me have a glimpse of her, I should go away with a lighter heart," was the message I took to her bedside.

She was half-awake and opened her eyes wide when I knelt down to say the words in her ear. By the time they were said, she staggered to her feet, pushing back her hair from her temples with both hands, and reached for a pink dressing-gown lying across a chair.

"Of course I will!" she said in short breaths. "It is very little to ask! the very least I can do! Which window, did you say?"

It was that about which the honeysuckles grew. She was dizzy with pain, still. I steadied her as she walked, and opened the shutters. The flower scent rushed in in warm waves from the jarred vines. As Marion leaned over the sill, the sprays, starred with pale blossoms, framed

her face and figure for the eyes strained upward for the coveted "glimpse."

The Blessèd Damozel of the rapt poet's dream looking "over the gold bar of heaven," was not fairer.

Dick stood under a great catalpa tree near the front gate. The boughs, heavy with flowers, almost touched the head bared as he caught sight of the apparition in the window. Marion waved her hand and smiled.

Such a smile I shall never see again until we meet on the thither side of the gold bar.

I drew back involuntarily as Dick's eyes met hers. What that long, last look said was theirs — theirs, alone. Not a word was spoken by either.

My mother's voice from the porch broke the spell, or the mute communion of spirits. She had just come out, and did not glance toward our window.

"Are you waiting to say 'Good-by' to Molly, Dick? I think she went up to Marion's room. Shall I call her?"

"No, thank you, Auntie! She and I have

said 'Good-by.' Is Uncle Burwell around anywhere? I'd like to see him before I go."

His tone was manly and hearty. I knew from it what strength he had drawn from the "glimpse." I had pulled the shutters inward, in obedience to Marion's gesture, leaving a little space between them. We stood together, looking through the crack, my arms about her swaying form, while Dick mounted and rode down the lane between the double row of catalpas. He was a gallant figure, erect and stalwart, sitting the horse as if he were a part of him, and carrying his head high, as one who goes forth to fight and to win.

Marion pressed her temples between her palms in turning from the window.

"I am afraid I must lie down again," she said feebly. "For a little while, you know! I do want to be brave! *He* is!"

I helped her back to bed. Then I went downstairs to ask Marthy to make a cup of coffee for her, and stayed away a long time.

Marthy would not let me take up the tray. (We called it a "waiter" in Old Virginia.)

"You mought slop the coffee inter the saucer," she explained. "An' thar's nothin' in th' youner-verse as upsets a onverleed's appetite ekal to slopped coffee — or anything else sloppy, fer that matter!"

Marion lay on her side, her face toward the door. She opened her eyes and smiled at our entrance. I heard Marthy catch her breath, as one might who makes a misstep, or is struck from behind. Yet she spoke softly and with composure.

"Miss Mar'on, honey! I want you to take a few mouthfuls o' coffee. You don't want it, I know, but you'll take it jes' to obleege me whar waited 'pon you' mar when she warn't no older 'n you is now."

I exclaimed when her next movement was to open the shutters and let in the light upon the bed. Marion's eyes were heavy and the lids were flushed. She shielded them with her hand.

"I'll shet the blinds agen in a minute," said Marthy, soothingly. "I wanted to see how much makin' up you' bed needs. You'll be comfort-abler with a clean piller-case."

She closed the shutters, smiled encouragingly upon Marion's success in swallowing half a cup of coffee, adjusted pillows and sheet, stroked back the disordered curls, and disappeared with her tray.

Marion's hand groped for mine in the twilight made by the closed shutters. Her fingers were hot and tremulous.

"Molly, dear!"

"Yes, darling!"

"You won't mind my not talking? I can't—yet! But I'm glad you know!" I bent to kiss her forehead, and pressed her hand.

"It is all right, dear! I understand!"

"Thank you!"

The murmur was hardly audible. After that nothing was said while I sat by the bed, fanning her gently, and seeing her features less and less distinctly as the night crept about us from the corners of the room. I could just trace the outlines of her profile against the white pillow when my mother entered, as noiselessly as a shadow.

My warning finger was not needed. She motioned to me to yield my post to her, and, still in dumb show, sent me down to supper.

From the stairhead I saw Dr. Skelton in the lower hall. He was laying aside his hat and riding-whip and had the manner of one bent upon business. I comprehended at once that he had been sent for, and to see Marion. My father met him with a grave face that terrified me even more. I sat down on the top stair, too weak to stand, and heard all they said. Marthy, whose opinion both accepted without question, thought that Marion was threatened with serious illness. She had spoken of having a chill a few days before; she had had a constant headache for over a week; she had fever now, and Marthy had detected that afternoon the peculiar glassiness in the eyes, the flushing of one cheek, and not the other, which indicated to the trained eye a disease greatly dreaded in central and southern Virginia — congestive fever.

I sat on the stairs until the two men came up. The doctor bade me a jaunty "How d'ye do?" My father laid his hand in sympathy upon my head in passing. He understood me when few others did. Even he could not guess the leaden weight that bore my heart down to the lowest

depths when I reflected that Dick Carter would begin his northward journey to-morrow morning; that in twenty-four hours he would be beyond the reach of tidings from us. The magnetic telegraph was still an unknown luxury in rural Virginia, and Richmond, thirty miles away, was the nearest railway station.

I clutched at my throat in the quick imagining of what might happen before any word could be sent to the absent lover. I ground my teeth and clenched my fists in recollecting that nobody excepting my impotent, insignificant self would recognize the propriety of sending for him were Marion on her death-bed.

Uncle Carter's home was seven miles from ours. Had it been half as far I really think I should have tried to walk there that night to see Dick, so desperate was my mood. My father's foot struck the floor of the passage outside of the sick room. He stopped when he got to me, and, as before, laid his hand upon my head.

"Don't be down-hearted, daughter. You are too apt to rush to the darkest conclusions. I don't think you need be unhappy about Marion.

She is young and strong, and has a good doctor and the best nurses in the country. She may be up and about in a few days. Mother and I thought it well to send for the doctor in time. Better be sure than sorry!"

With a lighter heart I followed him downstairs, and took my mother's place behind the tea-tray. She would not leave Marion until Marthy had made her preparations to sit up with her all night. The doctor complimented me upon my "matronly grace" when I poured out his coffee, and talked politics for the rest of the time we were at table. And this after admitting that "Miss Marion might be in for a spell of fever, and she might not. By to-morrow night he would be able to express a more definite opinion!"

By to-morrow at this hour Dick would be on the night train for Philadelphia!

With the feeling of one who walks and works in a dream, with ankles manacled and hands bound to his side, I lived through that night and the next day. Dr. Skelton was there twice, and on his second visit decided to remain all night. By

another morning it was determined that Mrs. Cunningham should be apprised of her daughter's illness. The messenger returned with the news that she was confined to her bed with a slight attack of fever similar to that which had stricken down the fairest of her flock, and Mr. Cunningham did not dare let her know of Marion's condition. He would be over in person as soon as he could get there.

He came early in the afternoon, bringing a neighbor who had volunteered to assist in nursing.

Mr. Cunningham was an old man, twenty years the senior of his wife. I met him at the front door and conducted him to his daughter's room. Up to this afternoon she had lain most of the time in a stupor, a semi-delirium, in which she took no notice of those around her, and only aroused to swallow food and medicine. When she did speak, her voice was a hoarse whisper, owing to the dryness of throat and mouth. At the sound of her father's voice, a light broke over her face, a smile that restored some resemblance to her normal self. She called him by name,

affectionately and audibly; when he stooped to kiss her, one weak arm went up to his neck.

I had not greeted Mr. Cunningham cordially. Feeling that his edict had caused his child infinite sorrow, and perhaps had led to her present illness, I could not be friendly, even in seeming. I did not doubt their mutual devotion when I saw the effect his presence had upon her, and the strong emotion he was too infirm to conceal. The large, slow, painful tears of age fell from his eyes upon the hands he held fast to his lips, unable to utter an articulate sound. Marion's smile was unearthly sweet.

"My dear, *dear* father!" she murmured, trying to speak plainly. "I am better to-day. Ever and ever so much better. Am I not, Molly? And seeing you, father, will make me almost well. What day of the week is this?" — putting her hand to her forehead, confusedly. "Monday — did you say, Molly? I shall go home on Friday. Look out for me!"

"My lamb! my baby! you could not bear the journey. If you were put into a carriage, your precious life would go out like the flame of a

candle. Wait until you are stronger," quavered the old man, too much overcome to choose his words.

The weak hand patted his wrinkled face and tried to brush off the senile tears. Her smile was tenderly arch.

"You'll see me at home on Friday! Did I ever break a promise to you? I am not really sick. I have no pain. Even the headache has gone — for good, I hope. I am only very tired — that's all — " turning her cheek to the pillow, with a long, broken sigh. "Tired, and *so* sleepy, *sleepy! sleep — !* "

The old man left her asleep. That was what they called the lethargy to him. He dared not remain from home over night for fear of alarming his wife. Dr. Skelton came in as he was leaving, and sent him off with hopeful words. The seizure was the climax of what had been working in Miss Marion's system for weeks. She had fought it bravely, but even brave women had to succumb to fever. There was a great deal of fever in the county this season. So much rain, followed by hot suns, must bring about a deplor-

able state of general health. Especially when our lowgrounds were imperfectly drained.

Mr. Cunningham's foot was upon the carriage step, his bulky body half within the roomy vehicle. He swung himself with a grunt on to the seat, and leaned forward.

"*My* lowgrounds are as well drained as any in the state of Virginia, sir! I defy you to show me any better!"

He slammed the door and lifted his hat with a shaking hand. "Good day, gentlemen! Drive on, Ned!"

"I thought that would change the run of his ideas for a while," grinned the doctor, as he and my father turned back to the house. "A counter-irritant isn't a bad thing sometimes."

Both of them laughed. I heard it all from the upper window. And in the room behind me the old man's "lamb," his baby, Dick Carter's idolized angel, was swimming for her life, deaf to weeping and to laughter! Oh, it was a heartless, wicked world!

I was allowed to sit up with Marion until midnight. If anybody else in the house were awake,

no sound penetrated to the darkened upper chamber to prove this. The night was sultry, and every window stood wide open. The flowers were too spent by the hot day to breathe freshness. Their fragrance hung, still and warm, in the air, adding to the oppressive closeness that made respiration a conscious effort. At eleven o'clock the harvest moon was above the wooded horizon; her beams were as yellow as those of the night-lamp set upon the floor of the hall. A broad pencil of moonlight slid slowly down the wall to the head of the bed. My eyes were following it from my seat near enough to Marion for her to feel the gentle breeze from my fan, when she spoke my name.

A musket-shot would not have startled me more, but three days' apprenticeship in self-forgetfulness for the good of the beloved one had not been thrown away.

"Yes, dear!" I responded quietly, my voice hardly louder than the hammering thuds of my heart.

She was quite conscious. I saw that at a glance. Her voice, changed though it was, had some of

the soft cadences that used to make her speech musical.

"We are quite alone, Molly?"

"There is nobody here but me, Marion. What can I do for you?"

"If I shouldn't get well, Molly dear —"

I gulped down a sob.

"Marion! darling! don't think of such a thing! You are better — ever and ever so much better! You told your father so to-day. And you'll be better still to-morrow!"

"I hope so! For the sake of my father and my mother — and Dick — I pray that I may get well. I am young, and life is sweet. Give me some water, dear, please! My voice gives out when my tongue gets dry."

When I brought the water, her hands were moving. Something glistened in the moonlight. She held it up, and I saw she had drawn a ring from the third finger of her left hand. I knew it well. She had worn it a long time — a heavy, chased ring of an odd design, a tiny ruby heart just visible under two clasped hands.

"Dick gave it to me when I was fifteen and

he twenty," she said. "I had won a philopena from him and I could not refuse the present, although I scolded him for spending so much money on it. Mother knew about it, and did not object. I want you to keep it for me. If I get well, I will take it back. If not — Molly! send it to him when you write — I want *you* to write to him and tell him. Nobody else knows. Nobody else must know. Tell him I loved him to the last — that, had I lived, I could never have loved anybody else — and ask him to meet me where all the pain, and sorrow, and misunderstandings are over. Our being cousins won't make any difference *there!* Promise me!"

I promised upon my bended knees, my tears bathing the betrothal ring. I told her, too, as well as I could for crying, how I was to correspond with Dick purposely that he might know how things were going with her; how constant and devoted was his love for her, and how he honored her fidelity to duty.

She listened, that heavenly smile lighting up her glorious eyes.

"You have made me very happy," she mur-

mured when the story was done. "God is good to give me this comfortable hour with you!"

Twelve o'clock struck from the clock in the hall.

Right upon the last stroke a timid rap sounded on the door, which was half open.

"May I venture to hope that the relief-picket will not be regarded as an intruder?" said precise tones, and Miss Marcia Snead pushed the door back, her tall figure looming against the dim background of the lamplighted hall.

Chapter X

Miss Marcia

"Learn to live, and live to learn ;
Ignorance, like a fire doth burn ;
Little tasks make large return."

—*Bayard Taylor.*

A CAUSTIC reviewer has said of certain popular tales of New England life, that if they are truthful portraits of live men and women, then our far Eastern States are peopled by "freaks."

At the risk of provoking similar strictures upon my pictures of scenes in the Old Dominion which I had opportunities of studying such as no other living author has enjoyed, I affirm that those times and the latitude combined to produce rare

types of individual character — some grand, many grotesque. In that day every human plant had room for growth; each species fructified its own kind. The pollen of moral and spiritual influence does not fly far. Every family was a close corporation, and, within the pale of legislative enactments, each was a law unto itself. Social and domestic systems were as nearly patriarchal as was consonant with the genius of nineteenth-century civilization and a republican form of government.

Alban Snead, a planter living upon his patrimonial estate of Falling Creek, in comfort that might have been luxury, had he been a temperate man, was a notable illustration of what I have just written. He inherited a large fortune, and his wife brought him money, servants, and lands. His natural intellectual abilities were more than fair; he had received a liberal education, carrying off, with apparent ease, honors his classmates had worked hard to gain, and missed. He had travelled further and seen more at home and abroad than any other resident of the county; his address was agreeable, and, although some-

what below the medium stature of vigorous manhood, he was prepossessing in appearance in his youth. With all these odds in his favor he was known from one side of Powhatan to the other as a sot whose violent temper and eccentric escapades would have brought him before the bench of magistrates a dozen times a year, but for family traditions and universal sympathy for his wife and children.

Of these last there were four boys and four girls.

"Just the number for a quadrille!" Alban Snead would hiccough in the public square on Court day. "And I don't deny that I keep the dance going pretty lively generally. If a man have not many inches, he must lay to the strap more strength. The dancing makes 'em grow like weeds. There ain't one that don't promise to be as tall as their mother."

No tutor would stay in the ill-regulated household. The girls, as well as the boys, attended an old-field school taught by an odd genius who could speak Latin fluently, and who wrote down the learnèd tongue in English as "latten"; who

could analyze every plant in field or fen, and register it under the proper scientific name; who knew every problem in Euclid as well as his godly wife knew the Shorter Catechism, yet hesitated when a scholar asked if Thomas Jefferson or Patrick Henry drafted the Declaration of Independence. Alban Snead supplemented the deficiencies in the old-field curriculum from a wealth of general and particular information which gained for him the sobriquet of "Walking Dictionary," "Walker's" being the standard lexicon in use in Virginia schools.

Under the joint tutelage of eccentric master and worse than eccentric parent, the Snead children were erudite to a proverb. They devoured and assimilated works unknown, save by name, to many college graduates. Shut out from county society by their father's habits and whims, they fell back upon literature for companionship, and when they chanced to associate with their neighbors, talked like the books upon which they were fed.

Mrs. Alban Snead was fully six feet high, and might have been supposed to be six feet three, so lank and spare was she. Her husband did not

rise five feet seven, and was grossly fleshy. It was rumored that he beat her when he was drunk. But for the incongruities in the picture of the roly-poly Benedict flogging the giantess, the neighborhood gentry would have looked more closely into the scandalous story, and, had it proved to be true, would have made the region too hot to hold him. There was foundation for the report in the cowed, absolutely abject mien of the wife, as seen at church. She appeared nowhere else abroad, and not regularly there. Her chalk-white face was piteous in its drooping lines and in the hunted hopelessness of the sunken eyes. She stooped more and more with each year — her dress, although clean, was that of a woman too busy or too listless to take note of the coming and going of fashions. Her four daughters had the same general air of submission to tyrannical rule. A strain of the bellicose father saved them from spiritless dejection. The boys were all younger and had their "weird to dree" in the years to come. The eldest, a sturdy lad of fourteen, had been heard to threaten to "spunk up and take it out of the old man's

hide" as soon as he was big enough. Listeners to the threat shrugged their shoulders prophetically. The "it" was exceeding broad and of long standing.

Miss Marcia was the first-born of Alban Snead's progeny. She was as tall as her mother, plain of face and angular of frame, as erudite as her father, and as simple of heart and motive as the yearling boy who was still at the mother's breast. At an early age her precocious intellect and demure behavior had attracted the notice of the "church ladies." At twenty, she taught a class in the Sunday-school at Pine Creek Meeting-house. Mary 'Liza and I were put into it at my father's express request. The Cunningham sisters also belonged to it, and my mother and Mrs. Cunningham made many opportunities of showing kindness to the girl so wofully handicapped by heredity and environment. While she lived she retained a sense of profound, almost worshipful, gratitude toward these two good women. By their connivance she procured fine sewing to do in order to buy the books her father would not give her money to get. The

neighborhood was in her confidence and kept the secret. Alban Snead would have horsewhipped her, grown woman though she was, had he found it out.

She was sewing for Mrs. Cunningham under pretext of paying her a visit of several days, when the news came of Marion's illness. At her instance the tidings were kept from the mother, and Miss Marcia arranged the details of the conspiracy. Mrs. Burwell had invited her *so* often to visit her, and since she was sewing for Marion, what did Mrs. Cunningham think of her going over there with her work, if Mr. Cunningham would be good enough to send her? Fitting and fussing with clothes and things were not conducive to comfort when one was ill. Mrs. Cunningham was too nervous to be consulted about such matters at present.

The suggestion was couched in phrases far more ornate than this abstract. I am certain, however, that "conducive" is a literal quotation.

To other accomplishments she joined that of skilful nursing. She had once confided to me,

under the seal of secrecy, that had the "existing conditions and prejudices of society been other than what they were, she would have aspired to the study — and perhaps" — glancing warily around and lowering her voice — "even to the practice of the healing art, treading, an humble follower, in the footsteps of Galen and Hippocrates. Since, however, it is reckoned unseemly for our sex to pursue such avocations, I must bow to the will of the powers that be."

I have still somewhere among my papers a note brought to me by Dick Carter after one of his visits at Rhysdale, enclosing a *Choice Selection* of poetry by George Herbert, and bearing upon the envelope, "*Urbanity of Richard Carter, Esq.*," in Miss Marcia's hand. She wrote with a quill pen from a pullet's wing, and in what are now known as vertical characters. There the resemblance to bold, modern penmanship ceased. Miss Marcia's script was timid and uncertain. Her speech was, likewise, vertical and wavering.

The thoroughbred Virginia woman has a charming trick of ending a sentence which refers

to your previous knowledge of the subject, with an interrogative inflection. It means, although she does not say it in words — "You know?" Miss Marcia accentuated the peculiarity by *deferring* to her interlocutor. It was as if she had been used, from her infancy up, to having her opinions roughly challenged, or flatly contradicted. In my harum-scarum days I shocked Mary 'Liza and diverted Marion Cunningham by saying that Miss Marcia could not tell us in the Sunday-school class that the Bible was true without adding — "Don't *you* think so, too?"

In spite of her harmless peculiarities our liking for her was sincere, and our respect for her character and attainments great.

She had brought up a bowl of cracked ice and a glass of milk when she came to relieve guard, and set down the waiter upon the stand without a tinkle.

"You are a brave little nurse, Molly!" she said cheerfully, "and I make no doubt that our invalid is in far better case for your ministrations."

Marion answered the implied query: —

"Indeed I am, Miss Marcia. I have not felt so bright before for three days. Or is it four? It is hard to keep account of time when one is sick. I was telling Molly how good you all are to me. More milk? How fat I shall be when I get up! Now, my medicine? Then I shall go to sleep again. That is one thing in which I am proficient, — sleeping! Run away to bed, Molly! And you, Miss Marcia, must lean back in that big chair and doze. I feel sure that I shall not awake until broad daylight."

I stole across the hall, barefooted, at sunrise, to peep in through the half-open door, and tripped back again, light of heart and of step, to finish a letter I had begun to Dick. We would be sending to the post-office directly after breakfast. My pen cantered gayly over the paper: —

"She is so much improved this morning that I may bid you dismiss all forebodings. I have just looked into her room and seen our darling girl sleeping sweetly and naturally, with a healthy flush on her cheeks, and, if possible,

more beautiful than ever. Miss Marcia 'reclines,' as she would say, in the easy-chair, looking like a weary obelisk swathed in green calico. (Query: why must people with no complexions to speak of make it a point of conscience to wear grass-green or royal purple?)

"Truly, my dear cousin, I have told you all I know — or that anybody knows about our poor dear's illness, now, we hope, nearly over, and happily. Don't vex your soul with the idea that I am smoothing things over. As I have said, she promised her father that she would be at home on Friday. I hardly believe *that*, but she is certainly on the high road to recovery. I shall send you a daily bulletin as long as she is here. I can do this without exciting suspicion. Somebody goes to the Court House every day, and two of our men have wives there."

Marion kept the high road bravely all that day, and on Wednesday Dr. Skelton was jubilant.

"One more day's victory and we shall be out of the woods!" he ejaculated, looking into

the grateful eyes upraised to his until he had to wink away a gathering mist. "You needn't laugh at my mixed metaphor, Miss Molly Sauce-box! When a man's head topples with pride and pleasure, he doesn't pick and choose his words. Miss Marshy!" — wheeling upon her so quickly that she tilted back upon her heels — "here's my hand, madam! You are a brick of the first water. Conglom' it! There's another unholy mixture!"

We were all laughing, Marion most heartily of all, being too weak to control her risibles, and he feigned to be furious at our "giggling like a gang of giddy geese!"

Then, sobering down, he sat on the bedside, felt Marion's pulse, looked at her tongue, and notified her solemnly that she was to have a piece of the breast of a chicken for dinner; that she was to eat every scrap of it, and wash it down with a glass of porteree.

"Such porteree as nobody but Mrs. Burwell here makes to perfection!" glancing over his shoulder to bow to my mother. "Porteree — concocted according to her recipe, ice-cold, and

powdered with nutmeg — is, I am convinced, what Homer and the rest of those old ignoramuses miscalled 'nectar.' By Jingo! — saving your presence, ladies — I'd be willing to be sick in bed for a week to get a drink of it on a scorching August day!"

"Then I *can* go home on Friday!" said Marion, unexpectedly.

The doctor was not nonplussed. He pulled one mutton-chop whisker and seemed to study.

"Friday! Let me see! Hum-m-m! Continue to behave yourself and do everything Miss Marshy here tells you to do, if it is to eat an ox whole, and on Friday we shall see what we shall see!"

"Because," pursued Marion, as sweetly and steadily as before, "I promised father that I would — and I never break a promise to my father!"

She had the chicken breast and a glass of my mother's incomparable porteree at noon, and enjoyed both.

I was writing a description of the scene with the doctor, in my temporary quarters across the

hall, at five o'clock, when Miss Marcia's deprecatory tap fell upon the doorpost.

"I crave a thousand pardons, Molly, my dear! but your ever thoughtful mother has actually expelled me from the dormitory where I cannot but feel that my duty lies. She will have it that you and I should taste the outer air for an hour at least, she taking my post as sentinel and hospital custodian. Am I conflicting with any more agreeable disposition of your time?"

"Not a bit of it!" called I, jauntily. Her stilted pleasantry always drove me into curt slang. "I'll be along in a jiffy. Wait for me on the back porch. It's too dusty to walk in the road!"

I scribbled a few hasty lines to Dick, humming a negro melody as my steel pen rioted down the page.

"Miss Marcia has just looked in to say that Mother has relieved her guard in M.'s room, and that she and I are to hie us forth to inhale the evening breezes — or words to that effect. Like myself, Miss Marcia is in high spirits — positively frisky, in fact.

"'I know it is a sin
For me to sit and grin
At her here —'

But I wish she didn't remind me of a jocular giraffe when she grows sportive in speech. I shall lead her home by way of the Old Orchard, and munch a sweeting apple in memory of you. I shall finish this (D. V.) to-night, or early in the morning. So, as Miss Marcia would say — 'more anon!'"

That was how it happened that when the sun was but a yard or two above the tree-tops, Miss Marcia and I were confabulating comfortably in the circular natural arbor about the bole of the big sweeting. The pigs had been let into the Old Orchard for a day since Dick and I had quarrelled in what was to me a historic area. They had made a clean sweep of windfalls, sound and unsound. Not one remained of the hundred or so the despairing lover had battered to pieces against tree trunks. I had to shake a limb to get a few apples for our eating. While we slaked our thirst and tickled our palates with them, I recounted the wondrous tale of a prize-

fight between two "devil's race-horses" (the "praying *Mantis*") I had umpired in this arena, six or seven years ago, for Cousin Molly Belle's entertainment. Miss Marcia hearkened with flattering interest, going on from that point to tell of other habits of the same queer "beastie" (the term was mine, not hers), and from this to relate wonders concerning bugs, beetles, and other creeping creatures and birds, which opened my eyes to the extent of her researches in natural history.

She alluded modestly to these as "studies in entomology and ornithology."

"Prosecuted under circumstances of peculiar difficulty," she said, "for the lack of scientific books. My dream from an early period of adolescence has been to go to a city boarding-school. I long for the friction of intellect against intellect that would develop what poor gifts are mine by providential endowment. The longing has grown into a passion. Mine eyes prevent the night-watches; I am haunted by day. Like Rachel of old, but with a difference in the object of agonizing desire, I cry, 'Give me knowledge, or I die!'"

She sat upon a large stone at the foot of the tree, her lank arms wound about her knees, her sallow skin muddied, rather than ruddied, by excess of feeling. I was stunned and dumb. Had the gray bole behind her broken into impassioned speech, I could hardly have been more amazed. Recalling that Dick Carter had once called her, to me, "an animated primer bound in buckram," I wondered what he would say could he see her now and thus, and hear the outbreak of the long-imprisoned tide of ambitious desire.

She went on, staring straight before her with eyes that saw naught visible to mine.

"There is sin in it, I am aware; heinous transgression of the tenth commandment. Sin that is revealed to my conscience whenever I hear or recite — 'Nor anything that is thy neighbor's.' I covet my neighbors' educational advantages; their intellectual nutriment. I would barter ten years of such existence as lies before me to go for one year to your school; to study your lessons; to sit at the feet of your Gamaliels and drink in knowledge!"

Every line in the homely visage was tense;

the muscles showed in her lean arms and wrists like bow-strings. I was too much moved to smile at the absurd visionings.

"Dear Miss Marcia!" I said gently, "there is not one of my teachers who knows one-half as much as you! You could learn nothing from them worth your having. Why, I heard father tell Dr. Skelton yesterday that there were not three better-read people than you in the county!"

"'Better-read' is not equivalent to better-educated. I am deficient in the education (from *educere*, drawing out) — the training of mental powers — that comes from communion with other and finer intellects, more richly stored with what I have never had the opportunity of acquiring. When I read of the *salons* of Madame de Staël, the colleagues of Madame Roland, the daily associates of Hannah More, my soul is like a caged bird. And I shall die athirst and famished! As I have lived! As I am living!"

Here was a form of suffering clean beyond my ken. I had read of, and imagined for myself, the yearning for affection as for living waters,

and believed that one might die of the unappeased longing. The passion for learning for learning's sake, the cry of the intellect for a companion mind, belonged to an undiscovered country. Perhaps because I had been born and had lived amid congenial surroundings, and my mind had always been supplied with as much food as it could digest. Yet I appreciated the reality of her suffering. I thought of it with acute sympathy, when I read, years later, Alexander Smith's outcry: —

> "Oh, I feel like a seed in the cold earth,
> Quickening at the heart and longing for the air!"

With this woman "earth" meant "grave," with no hope of resurrection.

"I wish I could exchange places with you!" I said as awkwardly as untruthfully.

She threw out both arms to their full length.

"For God's sake, child, do not speak such blasphemy! But *One* — since the beginning of the ages — has voluntarily exchanged heaven for hell, and He prayed that the cup might pass from Him if possible! It was not possible for Him! Some day — whether in the body or out

of it, I know not — GOD knows! — I may be able to say, 'Nevertheless, not my will, but Thine be done!'"

I was confounded to see her arise deliberately from her seat and begin to pick off the bits of moss and twigs sticking to her skirt as carefully as if we had been discussing the most commonplace of topics. She had taken firm hold of her other self and thrust it back into the grave.

"The day is drawing to its close" — enunciating each syllable so circumspectly that I fancied the letters must prick her lips in passing. "I apprehend that your mother will be accusing us, mentally, of remissness in duty and selfish forgetfulness of the passage of time."

She made talk of the like pattern all the way through the orchard and the field I never crossed without recollecting another incident of the prize-fight afternoon. I scraped together enough scattered thoughts and words that fitted into them to relate to my companion how Cousin Molly Belle, she with my baby brother in her arms, and I clinging to her hand, had been chased clear across the field to the garden fence

by a bloodthirsty sow that had tried to eat the baby.

"I opine that the wild boar in his native state had decidedly carnivorous proclivities," Miss Marcia was saying when I interrupted her: —

"There is Marthy in the garden looking for somebody! Can it be for us?"

Chapter XI

"More Anon"

"Daylight, and then the dark:
Midnight, and then the morn;
And one bright star to mark
Where thou hast gone."

—*John Leighton Best.*

MARTHY was looking for us,—at least for my companion.

"Mistis say, if you please, Miss Marshy, she'd like to see you 's soon 's you come in," was the message, delivered with no haste.

It was so little likely to alarm me that I stepped aside to pick a bit of citronaloes to take up to Marion, who had an especial liking for the

aromatic shrub. In pulling it I happened to see a look exchanged between the others. They quickened their gait, but I was upon them before they had taken five steps. I seized Marthy's shoulder and turned her toward me.

"What do you mean? You are hiding something from me. Is she worse?"

"For the land's sake, Miss Molly! how sharp you take anybody up! Mistis ain't quite easy 'bout Miss Mar'on, and she want Miss Marshy —"

I heard no more. With all my speed — and I ran as fast as I could — Miss Marcia had hold of me at the bottom of the stairs. She was out of breath and as white as a sheet, but she had wit and discretion at hand.

"Compose yourself! She must not be agitated!"

By sheer force she made me stand still until I could breathe naturally, and did not let go of me until we were on the threshold of the sick room.

My mother was there, and my father, and two colored maids, one upon each side of the bed, each with a large fan, trying to draw the sultry air

toward the fainting girl. My father's arm was under her head, my mother was wetting the parted lips. The room reeked with sal volatile and brandy fumes.

"The change came on half an hour ago," said my mother to Miss Marcia. "We have sent for the doctor. Nothing brings up the pulse. It is hardly perceptible."

Marion lay like a broken lily — as purely pale, as limp, as unresponsive.

The reader has foreseen all along what the end would be. To me it was a bolt out of the blue. With the impatient arrogance of youth and inexperience, I insisted that she *could* not be so much worse as the others thought. Why, it was not four hours since we were all joking and laughing together about her bed and speculating as to whether or not she would be out of that bed in three or four days! She had been so hopeful, so free from pain — so like her bonny, blithesome self!

I pulled Miss Marcia away to the window, clutched both of her arms above the elbows, and almost shook her: —

"There *must* be something to be done besides your brandy and your mustard-plasters and hot foot-baths! People don't die so easily! What has happened since three o'clock to change everything that you were so sure of then?"

I said it in a fierce whisper, and I must have hurt her, for my nervous fingers pinched and kneaded her arms as pincers might.

She answered in a low tone without wincing or offering to move: —

"I apprehend internal hemorrhage. I have read of such cases in medical treatises. I have known, personally, of two. The danger is imminent. What man can do we are trying to do. The issues of life and death are with the Almighty — not with us."

My grasp relaxed; my hands fell dead.

"You mean, then, there is no hope?" I uttered in a dull tone. A despondent shake of the head was all the answer I had. The kind eyes were full of tears the nurse would not let fall.

I could not cry. The horrible clutch upon my heart was like a tourniquet above an artery, stopping the channel of tears.

"Let me help you!" I said in the same lifeless way. "Set me to work!"

I was not needed. I may have been in their way, but my mother and she kept me busy as long as there was anything to do. I brought the doctor up when we heard his voice below; I spread mustard and refilled hot-water bottles, and tore bandages, and took my turn at the fans, — silent and alert in a frozen calmness, and all the time I knew what was to be — perhaps in a few minutes, perhaps in a few hours.

She lived until the new day began to dawn.

At sunset she had said to my mother — "I feel strange! Am I going to faint?"

From that moment she had given no sign of consciousness. When the sweet spirit passed away upon the last light breath, there was no struggle, no evidence of pain.

"We have much to be thankful for in knowing that she did not suffer!" said my mother, breaking the silence of the long minute that follows the awful monosyllable spoken but once above man that is born of woman and full of trouble.

It was my father's deep voice that had said, "*Gone!*"

Miss Marcia knelt to close the sightless eyes, then sank her face in the pillow, shaking with grief.

As I passed him on my way to the door my father's arm encircled me abruptly; he held me to him for one mute second, pressing his lips to my forehead, then let me go.

My dear, deep-hearted father! whom some called cold and stern — who else ever knew me as you knew me!

He let me go, and nobody went with me to the chamber across the hall. The chamber I had left so gayly that afternoon for the walk with Miss Marcia! I lighted a lamp, took it over to the writing-table, and opened my portfolio. Dick must be written to, and without delay. Not one of his relatives would consider this a duty. A few days hence, his mother, or one of his sisters, would speak among other items of neighborhood news of "the sudden death of poor, dear Marion Cunningham." I had promised to write every day while she was here. She was here still in a

sense — as much here as she would be anywhere on earth from this time forth and forevermore.

The portfolio opened at the unfinished letter; I read the last sentence as if some one else had written it: —

"*I shall finish this to-night* (*D. V.*) *or early in the morning. So — as Miss Marcia would say — 'More anon!'*"

Stupefied I sat, staring at the flippant phrases, embodying the solemn "(D.V.)"

Deo volente! If God wills!

He willed that I should keep my pledge to my absent cousin.

What had come to pass in the room opposite had been likewise of His willing. Into my stupid misery trickled the echo of Miss Marcia's mournful monotone: —

"Some day I may be able to say — 'Nevertheless, not my will, but Thine, be done!'"

"I shall never say it!" I uttered aloud and defiantly. "Never! Whether this is God's work or the devil's, it is *murder* — wanton murder! Nothing less!"

I picked up my pen.

"More anon!" Mechanically, I defined the old English word: "Quickly; soon; by and by; presently!"

How horribly soon! with what damnable quickness! and what a "more"! I tore the page across, then into bits; threw them into the waste-basket, and began another letter. While I had strength it must be done, and while I was alone.

"*Dear Dick:*—"

Ten minutes passed before another word was written. Heart and brain became more numb with each moment. Through the denseness gaining upon my senses like a fog, but one thought was defined: I ought to prepare Dick for the blow I was to deal. Ever since that black hour when invention travailed with that one thought, I have repudiated the theory — a dogma with the unwounded — that one should be delicately and dexterously "prepared" for evil tidings. By so much as the certainty of loss is preferable to racking suspense, is the direct communication of the awful truth to be chosen instead of "tactful" approach to the harrowing revelation.

I had not worked out the problem at fourteen-and-a-half. Instinct, and not reason, moved me, at last, to write four lines instead of four pages: —

"*Dear Dick: — Marion died unexpectedly and quietly at daybreak, half an hour ago. Before she grew worse she gave me a ring to keep for you, and sent you her dear love. The Lord have mercy upon us all!*

"*Molly.*"

This was the "More anon!" I had promised.

I was sealing the letter when the clattering hoofs of horses ridden at the top of their speed broke the stillness of the summer dawn. A swift messenger had been despatched to Rhysdale as soon as the fatal change in the sick girl was apparent. The hurrying horsemen would be her brothers, both so much older than she that the pretty sister was their pet and plaything. I heard the halt at our gate, as impetuous as the gallop; hasty steps upon the gravel walk and, without the pause of a second, upon the staircase. My mother pushed open the door of the

room in which I was sitting, not knowing I was there, and beckoned them in.

"Oh, my poor boys!" I heard her begin, and had one glance at the livid horror of each bronzed face. Then I slipped by them, unobserved, and fled out of hearing.

Would Dick Carter's face wear that look when he read those four lines? The question ran with me and would not be distanced.

Marion had never broken a promise to her old father. *She went home on Friday!* We set out with her at three o'clock in the morning.

Uncle Carter's carriage had brought himself and my aunt, Cousin Burwell and his wife, to us early on the previous day; four of the nearer neighbors drove over with their wives and daughters at the ghastly hour I have named. Seven carriages received their loads at our gate in silence and in gloom made lurid by the torches borne by negro attendants, and the twinkling lamps on the driver's box of each carriage. A dozen gentlemen on horseback brought up the rear of the procession.

Four others rode by the hearse, two on each side.

A more eerie spectacle I shall never behold. We drove, without the sound of a human voice, down the avenue lined with catalpas, the blossoms, as black now as the leaves, loading the motionless night air with their scent; through the far plantation gate, held wide by two torch-bearers, and out into the highway deep in sand, the wheels crunching and hissing as they sank into it.

I had never ridden in a funeral train before, and the continuous, hollow roll, unlike any other sound known to civilization, was a novel horror to my imagination. Through sand and over shale, interrupted though it was by ruts, and broken into thuds by "corduroy" and bridge, I never got away from the echoing rumble. It filled my ears, and it was to haunt my dreams for many a long night. At dawn we were winding through the heart of a pine wood, the rising breeze setting the boughs to moaning over our heads. Clearing the wood, we saw the moon, wasted and wan, through gaps in the oaks and

hickories overarching the highway; the smell of sheep mint, pennyroyal, wild sage, and thyme, crushed by the wheels, rose and fell in waves; from the cavalcade in the rear we heard a low, intermittent murmur of men's voices.

There is not one feature and sound of the hour and scene which is not with me as I write of it. And through all and over all was that weird, solemn roll.

It set itself to words by and by: —

"*Man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets,*" — over and over and over, until I hardly restrained myself from beating time to the dirge.

It was a ten-mile drive to Rhysdale. We entered the outer gate at seven o'clock. At nine, old family servants bore the coffin, swathed and heaped with flowers, down the main alley of the garden to the ancient God's Acre, separated from it by a high box hedge. There was a prayer from the Presbyterian pastor, — a tedious, comprehensive prayer, — a funeral hymn, carried mainly by negro voices, rich, sonorous, and always plaintive.

Then — "*Dust to Dust; Ashes to Ashes! In the sure and certain hope of the resurrection of the Last Day, we commit the body of this, our sister, to the earth, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; Amen!*"

On the way back to the house, when, the formal order of the line broken, we straggled through the garden walks at our will, I struck into a side path.

"To get away from it all!" I said to myself, and that I had borne it as long as I could restrain the mad impulse to scream aloud my rebellion and my pain.

I knew the little alley well, bounded by syringas on one side and altheas on the other, all overtopping my head. Marion and I had strolled up and down its length many a time, our arms interlocked. One day I had woven a crown of syringa blooms for her while we walked and talked. I might be able to think of her here without the hot bitterness that should, by now, have yielded to softer emotions.

I was walking very slowly, my head down, and did not see my Aunt Janetta, Mrs. Carter,

coming down the path, until she spoke my name.

"Flora said she saw you turn into this walk, Molly," she said affectionately, "and I came back from the house to speak to you. I had a letter last night from Molly Belle. They are at the 'White Sulphur,' and Mr. Morton's health is greatly improved. She charged me to tell you, when I saw you, that the pair of ancient and honorable lovers you are so much interested in — my old friend, Barbara Allen, and Major Peachy — are there. Not together, of course" — laughing a little. "Barbara looks out for the proprieties. They have friends there and did not travel in company. But they drink the water in concert three times a day — the Major, four glasses, Barbara one, and a half tumbler at that. You can think how Molly Belle would tell the story!"

I was dumb. This was Dick Carter's mother! The girl we had left lying under the flowers back there was the dearest thing upon earth to him — now the dearest thing in heaven!

Aunt Janetta — my mother's sister — was a

"I WAS WALKING VERY SLOWLY, MY HEAD DOWN."

tender-hearted woman. She could not have been her daughter's mother and been wanting in feeling and tact. But she had seen many people die — I but one; and Marion, although a lovely girl, was really not of her blood kindred. I was — and she would cheer me up.

Her tone changed when I did not speak. She looked more attentively at me.

"Forgive me, my dear! You would rather hear the rest at some other time. I know how sore young hearts are under such losses. You feel it the more keenly, too, because the dear girl died at your house. Dick will be grieved to hear of it. He is an affectionate boy, and he and Marion were great cronies. We must try to think how much happier she is now than we could have made her."

Still I neither spoke nor looked up. We were strolling away from the house, and she stopped, taking my limp hand in hers.

"Come and see me soon, won't you, dear? I know that Mr. Carter will be anxious to get home to dinner. It is a busy time on the plantation just now. I may give your love to Molly

Belle when I write, I suppose? And I wish you would write one of your bright, cheery letters to Dick sometime. You are an especial pet with him, and I am afraid he will be a little homesick among strangers."

"I will," I said impassively. "To-morrow — maybe!"

Chapter XII

"The Phenomenon"

"The languages, especially the dead,
The sciences, and, most of all, th' abstruse,
The arts — at least, all such as could be said
To be the most remote from common use —
In all these *she* was much and deeply read."

— *Don Juan.*

GENERAL NUNHAM'S name was to the Lady Superior's advertisement and annual reports what a stout whalebone is to an elegant corsage.

"Mrs. General Nunham" was a stately heading to circulars and imposing upon visiting cards.

The two elder of the four sisters were the

daughters of the General's former marriage. Madam had been heard to speak of the two younger as our "joint children." A debilitated rumor gave the date of 1812 to the General's title. Another, as weak, said he had once been rich. The family had come to Richmond from Baltimore ten years before my story opens, with letters that gave them the *entrée* of the best houses in town, and secured a full school for the first session. By sheer merit they held what they had thus gained. The General and Mrs. Nunham had their private dining room. The step-daughters and the joint children presided over the boarding-pupils' table.

Husband and wife appeared together in the schoolroom during morning prayers, five days in the week. Unless we chanced to encounter him in the halls or on the stairs we saw no more of him from week's end to week's end.

Notable annual exceptions to this rule were made on the first day of each session (we say "term" now), and during the three days devoted to the final examination in July. He never spake a word then, but he carried out the whalebone

metaphor to perfection. Tall, gaunt, and saturnine of visage, he sat, as erect as a ramrod, and not more pliable, in the high-backed chair at the right hand of the Lady Superior, always wearing a body-coat, buttoned a third of the way up, very tight-waisted and very pigeon-breasted. The girls believed that his chest was padded, and that he wore stays. Some averred that they had heard them creak when he drew a long breath. His blue-black chin, closely shorn, rested level upon the edge of a military stock. When he walked, he marched; when he turned, he wheeled; when he stopped, he halted, suggesting "Attention! Right face!" and in rainy weather he carried an umbrella with the expression of shouldering arms.

"I suppose he has what might be called a martial carriage?" I had said, in my simplicity, to Cousin Molly Belle on the Monday we entered school, when I was going on eleven, and Mary 'Liza had entered her thirteenth year.

Cousin Frank's shout of laughter, and his wife's appreciation of the fun, puzzled me then. Afterward, I came to share in their doubts as to whether the General had ever, as Cousin Frank

phrased it, "smelled a mixture of gunpowder and lead."

The session this year was reopened upon Monday, October 5, according to Mrs. General Nunham's card in the daily secular and the weekly religious newspapers. Before we were fairly settled in our chairs behind our desks a whisper flew, like thistledown before a stiff breeze, from one end of the large general room to the other: —

"The Generalissimo" had a new coat! Of what a rattle-pate behind me called "handy-spandy broadcloth." A body-coat, of course (in modern lingo a "swallow-tail"), fitted with exactitude that almost — some said, quite — revealed the outline of the ramrod. One and all of us had inspected and passed judgment upon it by the time he had marched to the head of the apartment, wheeled, stood at attention for twenty seconds, then bent himself from the perpendicular.

"Into a hollow square!" said the rattle-pate in my ear, and my risibles got the better of propriety.

"Old Miss" had made her conventional little

address of welcome, and hoped for the usual impossible results from our "auspicious reunion," and we were requested to open our Bibles at the first chapter of the Book of Proverbs, before it was quite safe for me to lower the palm-leaf fan I had caught up hastily from my desk to screen my face. The Bible reading sobered me somewhat, yet not so thoroughly that I did not remark, for the hundredth time, that General Nunham wheeled upon his heels and remained standing with his face to the wall, still in the "attention" attitude, while everybody else in the room knelt in prayer.

As soon as "Amen!" was said, he wheeled and marched out again, elbows squared, and knees tied at regulation distance by an invisible cord. In the door he wheeled about face, and actually gave the military salute! Mrs. Nunham sank almost to the floor in a courtesy copied in unison by her daughters, and the figure-head disappeared for twenty-four hours.

The wicked whisperer — whose daughter, by the way, is writing mighty clever books anent Old Virginia life — gave the clew to this latest and,

to the uninitiated, amazing exhibition of Military Deportment by circulating the story in recess that the Nunham Sextette had spent a week of their vacation at West Point.

"He is billed to advance and give the countersign next Monday," she subjoined, knowingly.

"Young ladies!" uttered the Principal, from her chair upon the dais at the top of the room: "According to the custom of this Seminary, each pupil entered for the session is requested to come forward and affix her signature to the rules and regulations governing deportment and morals while she retains her connection with this institution. As each of you has been provided with a printed copy of these rules and regulations, we take it for granted that you are already familiar with that to which you are to give assent."

She always said these identical words. I never heard them without recollecting the embarrassment of a little country girl who whispered distressfully to me, on her way up to the table, that she "hadn't brought any money with her to school that morning. Would I lend her a cent?"

She had interpreted the concluding words according to sound, not meaning.

We filed up to the table in the order of our sittings. My desk — the same I had used for two preceding sessions — being near the upper end of the room, my cousin and I were among the first to "affix our signatures." I was idly awaiting the end of the, to me, unimportant ceremony, my elbow on the desk, my chin in my hollowed palm, thinking of nothing and looking at nobody in particular, when a head and a pair of shoulders grew into view above the moving crowd of girls.

"A daughter of Anak!" quoth my saucy neighbor, and Mary 'Liza and I turned upon one another looks of astonishment not to be conveyed in words.

Miss Marcia Snead, looking taller and thinner because of her mourning dress, worn for the father of whose death from apoplexy we had heard six weeks before, awaited her turn to sign "the articles of agreement." Thus she alluded to them afterward.

Her bony fingers twisted upon one another

nervously; her bearing indicated distressing embarrassment. Yet — and I do not know if I can describe this aright — in mien and in face, beyond and far above the diffidence of one new to the scene and circumstances, shone a sort of solemn exaltation. She looked like one who saw the goal in sight and the possibility of gaining it.

Presuming upon the lax regulations governing the school on opening day, I jumped up and threaded the jostling throng to Miss Marcia's side. The relief and pleasure that broke the constrained half smile she had worn for the occasion into a look of natural delight, would have repaid me had I been less sure of indulgence from the ruling powers.

I pulled her a little away from the rest, regardless of the stares and covert smiles of those about me.

"What are *you* doing here?" I asked, bluntly, too much surprised for formalities.

She told me, in well-chosen phraseology. Here, if anywhere, it behooved one to air one's best language. With the sanction of her mother, and the hearty approbation of her brothers and

sisters, she had enrolled herself as a student in Mrs. General Nunham's admirable Seminary. Meanwhile, her mother, to whom everything was left unconditionally during her life-time, had generously advanced what ready money was requisite, to be reimbursed at some future day.

"The path has been made very smooth for my feet," concluded Miss Marcia, intense feeling simplifying her ornate speech. "Sometime you will let me tell you of the wonderful providences that have starred the past six weeks. God has hearkened unto the voice of my cry!"

"It is your turn, now!" I interrupted, not sorry that I did not have to frame a suitable reply.

I went with her to the table and stood by her while she curved her exaggerated spine to reach pen and paper. Mrs. Nunham glanced interrogatively at me from the book where the lean fingers were inscribing in minute, vertical characters, "*Marcia Alban Snead.*" I nodded, reassuringly — I am afraid, patronizingly — and the Lady Superior, a thoroughbred at heart, held out her hand, soft, white, and bejewelled: —

"I hope you will be very happy with us, Miss Snead. I think we have no other young lady of the same name with us this year, although it is not an uncommon name in Richmond. You are, perhaps, a relative of Dr. Snead of our city?"

Miss Marcia blushed magenta in her happy surprise. Her courtesy was something to be recollected. It was not imitable.

"I am not aware that we are allied by consanguinity, or by marriage," she said. "Our patronymic, was, I opine, originally Sneyd — S-n-e-y-d. The name possesses romantic interest for those conversant with the history of the accomplished and ill-fated Major André. Pray accept my grateful acknowledgments for the cordial welcome you have vouchsafed to one so unworthy as myself. I humbly trust time will prove for me that your generous confidence is not misplaced."

She executed a second indescribable courtesy, and, backing away from the table, as from the presence of royalty, Miss Marcia perceived that she was the focus of seventy or eighty pairs of

eyes, all wide with wonder, some dancing in mirth hardly repressed.

She *tittered!* I am sorry to acknowledge it after recording her stilted inaugural and ceremonious retreat. There is no other word for the sound accompanying the return of the embarrassed half smile.

"Rather a tall schoolgirl — am I not?"

To the shame of themselves and their parents, be it said, some of the girls laughed. Mrs. Nunham's ruler rapped sharply upon the table: —

"*Order!* Young ladies! I am astonished and mortified! Those who have signed the rules will please resume their seats!"

Annie Gleason, the fun-loving girl who sat behind me, gave me a pinch as I resumed my chair. It signified inquiry, relish of the comic side of the scene, and approval of my indorsement of my country neighbor. Annie and I were always good friends. When it was safe to "communicate," she had her explanatory whisper:

"You're a trump! She's a Phenomenon!"

Annie was the sobriquet-maker, *par éminence*, of the school. The nickname, tossed carelessly

at the new scholar, fell squarely upon her brows and was fastened there by the examination of the new pupils before classing them, the most important event of Opening Day. Fifteen "new" girls had been entered that forenoon. They were ranged in a semicircle about the desk of the Lady Superior, and subjected to a brief general examination from her; to a longer and more searching from Miss Isabella and Miss Serena. Miss Marcia's diffidence vanished as she set her foot upon dear and familiar soil. Her thick, sallow skin paled and flushed by turns, as she was catechised and made answer. Ten minutes of the ordeal had not passed before curious contempt gave place to bewilderment in the countenances of spectators and auditors. As the examination proceeded the catechists became respectful, and even deferential. Stillness, that was almost awe, reigned throughout the schoolroom. Sublimely unconscious of the impression she produced, the "neophyte in scholastic lore" — as she spoke of herself when complimented by Mrs. Nunham upon her proficiency — sat upright and rapt, her eyes riveted

upon the teacher, replying with modest self-possession, and with invariable correctness, to every question. Her phraseology was Addisonian in dignity and purity of diction; she often quoted whole sentences from this or that writer upon mental and moral philosophy, rhetoric, history, astronomy, and the higher mathematics.

When the new pupils were remanded to their seats, an open Bible was thrust under my elbow from behind. Annie Gleason had stuck a pin into the first clause of Psalm 119:99:—

"*I have more understanding than all my teachers.*"

From that day and hour, then, Miss Marcia Snead was "Phenomenon" in the mouths of her fellow-students. The least respectful of the madcaps shortened it to "Phee," and did not scruple to address her by the abbreviation, an indignity to which she submitted amiably. She was the least conceited person I have ever known, and her persistent belief in the superiority of the stupidest of her associates to herself because they had been "instructed," and she had not, would have been ridiculous but for the profound humility as to her own attainments and propor-

tionable reverence for learning and the learnèd, of which the perverse misconception was a proof.

Her most hardly won victory was over Manesca and M. Guillaume. She read French by the eye as easily as she read English, even writing it with tolerable accuracy in her un-idiomatic style, as might be expected from one who had never heard the language spoken. Tossed into the foaming rapids of Manescan question and reply; swimming, while the master shouted furious gibberish from the shore — she was out of her depth at the first stroke, and the waters went over her head. Her exercises saved her from drowning. They were flawless, and as legible in her vertical script as a printed page. When M. Guillaume bade her, as an imposition for an imperfect recitation, transcribe before the next "French day," forty-eight hours off, twenty of the diabolical "*interrogatif et négatif*" exercises, copying the queries and composing the answers, he did it with a fiendish grin, assured, I am convinced, that he had, by the barbarous exaction, rid himself, finally, of a woman who gave him "*des nerfs*." Her homely face and

form, her ill-assured manner and her timidity, were a continual offence in his eyes.

All the sense of justice in him, and what modicum of chivalry remained in his French nature after twenty years of teaching, were aroused when the Phenomenon, haggard with overwork and tremulous with anxiety, laid an orderly sheaf of papers before him and backed respectfully to her seat, leaving her fate in his hands.

He praised her work frankly — and well the frankness became him — tiger as he was! He pronounced it "*parfaitement bien fait*," and the industry displayed in the accomplishment of the task, "*magnifique*." He called the attention of sundry slovenly penwomen in the class to the fact, "*vraiment étonnant*," that, where a mistake had been made, were it only in one letter, a penknife was used to erase it, and the right word or letter was written in so neatly that only a keen eye could detect signs of the erasure. Finally he told, in English, an anecdote of a so-called Professor of French who engaged to teach the language entirely by the eye and by means of the pen.

"Vidout speaking one word! Mademoiselle Snade may have graduate in his school! She does him much craydeet!"

He found no fault with her henceforward, and took occasion repeatedly to commend her admirable work, holding her up to the rest of us as an example of tireless energy and what he extolled as "sublime conscientiousness."

All the happiness — I might say all the comfort — she got out of her new life was found in the schoolroom and during study hours in the hall bedroom she occupied in a fourth-rate boarding-house on a cross street down-town. The place had been recommended to her as cheap and respectable, and ready money was not abundant with her at this juncture. Had Mrs. Nunham been able to accommodate her as a boarding pupil, acceptance of the position would have been an impossibility because of lack of means.

One gusty Friday afternoon in November I went out of my way to call upon her as I was going to take supper with Miss Barbara Allen. I did not visit my fellow-countywoman often. I was very busy, and had other friends nearer

my own age and with more congenial tastes. To be as candid with my reader as I was with Cousin Molly Belle, on this very Friday, moral courage was required to enable one to invite the Phenomenon to walk. Walking was my chief recreation out of school hours. Exercise and fresh air were then, as they have been ever since, solace and tonic to me.

"She is so long, and so lean, and so black, and so odd-looking altogether, that people stare at us," I confessed. "I am sorry for her, and I respect her, and admire her in a way, of course, but she *is* phenomenal, you know!"

"I know!" Cousin Molly's eyes were grave and sweet, with the clear, far-off look which meant she was thinking hard. "I must take her to drive oftener, and ask her to dinner and supper every Sunday, instead of every other week, as I have been doing. She *is* odd-looking, as you say. But she is a heroine! I can never forget what you told me of her goodness when Marion Cunningham was ill." And, after a pause neither too long, nor too significant — "If you are going out, wrap

up warmly, dear. The wind is very cold and high."

Was there ever such another woman for touching the right chord, and for never striking it too strongly?

Chapter XIII

My Lady Bountiful

"Your bounty is beyond my speaking;
But 'though my mouth be dumb, my heart shall thank you."
—*Nicholas Rowe.*

"YOU hardly expected to see me so early?" said I to Miss Barbara, bustling into her sitting room half an hour before the early sunset.

"On the contrary, I began to be afraid that the threatening weather was keeping you from coming at all!"

She got up from where she sat alone before a noble fire of soft coal, and came forward in her cordial way to help me off with my bonnet and

pelisse. Miss Barbara was not given to kissing and fussing, even over those she loved best. But her touch and the ring of sincerity in her voice meant more to me than a volume of love words and showers of kisses from some other people. I knew she liked me, and I was very fond of her. Just now my heart and head were full of something I was sure would interest her, — perplexity, out of which I felt vaguely that she could help me, at least partially.

She seated me in a warm corner, pushed a stool under my feet, asked after the welfare and doings of her especial friends the Mortons, and how matters were progressing at the Nunnery. She was never above using our catchwords and nicknames. Then, all unwittingly, she led up to the very matter I was burning to lay before her.

"By the way, I saw your Phenomenon yesterday on Broad Street. I recognized her immediately, although I have met her but once — and that for a minute, as she was coming out of Mrs. Morton's parlor and I was going in."

"Once seen, never forgotten!" said I, pithily.

"Right! And if I had never seen her, I think

I should have known her from your description. She reminded me of a pair of long-waisted tongs draped in bombazine, as she stood outside of Samanni's window, her shawl wound tightly about her. The wind whipped her skirts about her legs, and one hand held her crape veil down to keep her bonnet on. Her long nose made a bump in the middle of the veil. Otherwise, I should not have known on which side her face was. I was glad she was staring into a confectioner's window, and not into a bookseller's. In that case I should have been sorry for her. She looked so hungry, *all over*, somehow! After what I had heard of her appetite for books, I should have been tempted to rush in and buy out the windowful if she had been staring at them."

"I think she *was* hungry!" I blurted out, and plunged into the recital of how, calling at Miss Marcia's boarding-house, an hour or so ago, and seeing from the hall the parlor filled with loud-voiced women and smoking men, I had told the dirty maid who let me in to show me up to Miss Snead's room.

"It was at the very top of the house, and at

the back. There was no carpet on the floor, and very little furniture. Only a bed and a wash-stand, and a pine writing-table drawn up close to the window, and one chair and Miss Marcia's trunk, with a shawl thrown over it to make another seat. Her dresses were hung against the wall on one side of the room, under a calico curtain to keep off the dust. You never saw a shabbier place out of a poor-house. Everything was as neat as wax, though. Even the window-panes were clean and bright. Miss Marcia had on a frightful red-and-green blanket shawl, and her head was tied up in a worsted hood, and she wore woollen mittens. For there was not a spark of fire in the mean little hole, nor any place in which a fire could be made — no chimney and no stove. She was sitting at the table with her books piled up all about her, and as soon as she got over her flurry at the sight of me, she insisted I should take her chair. She 'liked to curl up her limbs luxuriously upon the bed. It reminded her of an Oriental divan.' When I took the chair, she would put a foot-stove under my feet.

"'That's another Oriental luxury!' she said, as gayly as could be. 'Travellers who have visited Italy tell us of old cronies hobbling into cathedrals, carrying earthen or metal vessels — "*scaldini*" — in the plural — "*scaldino*" in the singular — filled with hot ashes or ignited charcoal, and that ladies of quality, attending church in winter, are followed by footmen carrying similar vessels of finer materials and workmanship.'

"'Charcoal!' I said, 'isn't that dangerous in a close room?'

"'Not if proper precautions are taken. I leave the window open until the coals are fairly kindled, by which time the noxious gases are expelled from the carbonaceous fuel.' Doesn't that sound just like her? But oh, Miss Barbara! she looked so forlorn and frozen and *famished!* She always had what you may call creature comforts at home — plenty to eat, and warm, comfortable rooms to live and work in. She will kill herself at this rate before the winter is out. And she will die without a groan! She never uttered a complaint to-day, and was, as usual, full of talk

about our studies, and praises of the teachers — and saying what a privilege it is to live in an intellectual atmosphere! Yet I wish I could help her in some way!"

Miss Barbara pushed back her chair and began walking up and down the room, her hands behind her, her head bent.

"Tut! tut! tut!" came from between her teeth several times while I was speaking. When I stopped to take breath, she said:—

"'And Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd!' Exceeding glad! Poor, mean, selfish, *comfortable* wretch! And this is Christian Virginia! This is hospitable Richmond! I, and hundreds of other lazy blockheads, sit in the shade of the booths we have builded, and which gourds of the Lord's growing have covered — and see these things. Your Phenomenon's little finger is worth more in His sight than twenty-five of our corn-fed bodies with no souls inside to speak of! Great Heavens! If I were a man, I'd — *swear!*"

Working off some of the steam in these and other jerky ejaculations, she returned to the fire and hit it with the poker. It did not need atten-

tion and resented the indignity by a splutter of blue-and-yellow flames hissed angrily from the fat, black lumps.

"Yes! and here am I, with coal to waste and a big house full of furniture, and time on my hands, and cupboards and store rooms crammed with victuals of all sorts, and servants at my beck and call, and horses in the stable, eating their pesky heads off. And that woman! — all brain and energy and high ambitions and noble aims — starving and freezing at my gates! Good Lord! haven't you any thunderbolts to spare up there, that I live to tell the tale!"

The hands she had lifted above her head fell to her knees in a resounding slap.

"That's a pretty fair imitation of swearing!" said I, dryly. "I don't think you need the man."

"If one were here, he'd as like as not tell me that I am a fool for what I've made up my mind to do. Maybe he'd be right. I don't care a copper cent for his opinion. I'm going to make that woman come here and *live!* I shall invite her to make me a visit of a month or two, and

when I have her here, I'll manage to keep her by hook or by crook."

"She's mighty independent —" I demurred. "If there were something she could do for you, she might be persuaded. Sewing, or knitting, at night — or something like that. There's nothing she can't do!"

She slapped her knees again.

"Child! you're a genius! The woman that has been knitting Maj' Peachy's stockings for twenty years died last week. He won't wear socks, you know, on account of his rheumatism. He's a great sufferer, for all he never complains. He wears long stockings that come above the knee — lamb's wool in winter, thread and silk in summer," laughing in affectionate amusement. "He's a bit of a dandy in some things, the Maj' is, although I wouldn't let him know I think so. Well! this poor soul — a lady born and bred, although poor for years and years as Job's turkey-hen — almost supported herself by knitting those everlasting stockings. He uses up dozens of them every year. I was wondering this very evening, sitting here and looking into the fire,

where upon earth I could find somebody else to do the work.

"Yet there *are* people — respectable Presbyterians at that — who don't believe in particular providences! You are one to-day, and no mistake, Mousie!"

In the delight of recognizing me in my true character, she leaned over and gave me a kiss.

I caught her hand and hugged it.

"Dear Miss Barbara! *You* are the particular providence whenever you can make a chance to help anybody. And you never did a kinder thing than you are going to do now. Miss Marcia is so simple-hearted that she will believe everything you tell her about the stockings. I can see her now, sitting up until all hours to turn off a toe, and knitting 'M. P.' into the tops, fully persuaded that she is paying for her board."

We both laughed and fell to talking over the preliminaries of the proposed "visit" — what room the Phenomenon (we must stop calling her that, for fear our tongues might slip sometimes when she was by!) should have, and how she should be fed with the finest of the wheat

and the fat of lambs, and sleep upon a feather-bed so wide that she could "caty-corner" across, and find room for the full length of limbs and trunk — and how we would never call her "Miss Marshy." I had a reminiscence here: —

"She told me one day in confidence that one reason she was so fond of Mrs. Cunningham and my mother was that they called her 'Marcia.' 'Whereas nearly everybody else, even people of education and general refinement, address me as "Marshy,"' she said. 'I hope I am not vain, or unduly punctilious! But it awakens unpleasant sensations in my imagination when I am confounded with a *morass!*'"

My spirits were in a bubbling flow. It was such a noble thing Miss Barbara was doing, and I was so happy in the knowledge that I had helped bring about the change in Miss Marcia's condition, so full of visions of her altered future that it took very little to make me laugh a great deal. Miss Barbara was almost as much excited and as eager to see the fulfilment of our scheme as was I.

"My duty is as clear and as straight as the

Manchester turnpike," declared she. "If I can't yank a candle out of the wrong socket, the next best thing is to scrub the candlestick as bright as I can. I shall go to see her early to-morrow morning — directly after breakfast — and make her pack her trunk to be sent for, as well as herself, by dinner-time. I never let grass sprout, much less grow, under my feet. The Maj' says that is because I am a 'hot foot.' He makes himself very merry over my headlong ways. But I tell him I was born with warm, *real*, red blood in my veins, and not skim-milk. Between ourselves, he doesn't admire these whey-faced, yea-nay women any more than you and I do, but he must have his joke, — especially a joke on me."

I had promised to stay to supper upon condition that I should be allowed to go home directly afterward. There were lessons to be studied before bed-time, if I would not be tied down to them all of Saturday.

"Lessons, in this case, mean fearfully long exercises for M. Guillaume," I interpolated. "Black Monday is the blacker because it is French day. Miss Marcia was deep in work for

him this afternoon. Manesca lay open on the table. I told you, didn't I, how she fought, bled, and all but died, in her earliest encounters with him?"

"He's a brute!" said Miss Barbara. "A Frenchman is a cross between monkey and tiger. The tiger preponderates in Guillaume. Sometime, when the Maj' is in a talkative mood — that is, when rheumatism and dyspepsia are off guard — you must make him tell you of a wordy battle he and Monsieur Le Tigre had several years ago. I won't spoil the story trying to tell it. As might have been anticipated, the Frenchman was left *hors du combat*."

We had our supper laid in the cosey sitting room. There was not a trait of the conventional old maid about Miss Barbara. Her meals were, as she said, "like Easter, movable feasts." She partook of them wherever it pleased her. To-night, the sitting-room fire was "too good to leave." The round table for two was set in front of it. Such a supper as it was! And in what merry mood was it eaten! And what a glorious thing it was to have a fine old house

and an abundance of worldly wealth with which to make a home for the needy, and good cheer for all who came within the owner's influence!

Often as I had been in that room before, and frequent as were to be my visits in the future, I always recollect it as I saw it on that, the first inclement night of the season. Crimson damask draperies were looped away from lace curtains that hung straight before the embrasured windows; the walls were wainscoted with oak up to the ceiling, which was a fine specimen of the fretted "putty work" of the eighteenth century; the furniture was solid mahogany, and so antique that the lights reflected from it brought up ruddy glints from dusky depths far below the polished surface. A tall pier-glass between two windows gave back the gleam of fire and candles; the carpet was crimson like the curtains; a great, white wolfskin lay before the fire-place. Shining brass fender, brass andirons, and fire irons caught and repeated the high lights. Bookcases, filled with books, and family portraits relieved the wainscoted spaces from blankness.

This was the room — and the mistress was just

what the maker and the builder of such a home should be. She wore a shimmering gray silk that night, trimmed with black lace; a dainty lace cap, trimmed with white satin ribbon, was set above her silver-gray hair; she carried herself as queens should, but as they seldom do.

"If I could hope to look just exactly like you when I am your age, I should be perfectly satisfied!" I cried, impulsively, possessing myself of one of her hands — high-bred like the rest of her — and kissing it again and again.

She patted my cheek: —

"Nonsense, Mousie! I am a battered old hulk in dry dock!"

But she looked pleased, and I could not help recollecting that the Major would be there pretty soon, and that she would care to look well in his eyes.

She sent me home in her carriage. Rain had set in at nightfall; and the cobblestone pavements and brick sidewalks were shining with wet. As we drove along, I, gazing from the snug security of the chariot upon pedestrians with and without umbrellas, saw something that

made me smile, and something that made me frown.

The Generalissimo, enveloped in a cloak of military cut, one end thrown jauntily over his shoulder, emerged from the back gate which, six months agone, I had seen Leonard Brooks close to hide his parting with Sidney Page. Holding his umbrella perpendicularly over his head, he marched down the street, in the exact middle of the sidewalk, looking neither to the right nor to the left.

"So he uses the servants' gate on week-day nights!" I mused with curling lip. "What a disgrace to a man, made in the image of his Maker, to be a nonentity in his wife's eyes! The Lady Superior makes the most of her cipher upon exhibition days, but he is a cipher for all that!"

At the corner below the Nunnery, Major Peachy was scraping the mud from his boots upon the edge of the curbstone after a miry crossing. The man was one of my pet aversions. Seeing the slow scrape on the stone, when another man would have stamped twice

to dislodge the mud, then tramped on — I disliked him more than ever. The loose folds of his pantaloons about the shrunken calves put another idea into my head. How would Miss Marcia relish the task of knitting stockings eighteen inches long in the leg for that apology for the male of the human species?

I asked Cousin Molly the question when I had finished the stirring narrative of the afternoon call to Miss Marcia, and my subsequent visit to Miss Barbara.

She foresaw no trouble. Miss Marcia would beg for work of some kind; her hostess would speak of the death of the knitter and the Major's rheumatism.

"*Voilà tout!* We may trust Miss Barbara for the rest."

I felt that we could.

"But — doesn't it rather go against the grain with you to think of that brave —"

"Phenomenon!" supplied Cousin Molly Belle.

"*Heroine!* devoting hours and hours to fashioning coverings for those old — *tobacco-sticks!*"

Cousin Molly Belle laughed.

"If I must speak my mind, Molly, it goes much harder with me to think how another woman — quite as much of a heroine in her way — believes in and looks up to the man to whom the tobacco-sticks belong. It is an unsolvable mystery. We must be very careful not to hint anything of this to Marcia, should she accept Miss Barbara's invitation. It is better that she should rate him at his sister-in-law's valuation."

Saturday noon I had a note from Miss Barbara.

"*Veni! vidi! vici!* I have met the Phenomenon and she is mine! B. A."

On Sunday, Miss Marcia came to dinner, I having conveyed to her Cousin Molly Belle's invitation on Saturday.

"The most incredible thing has happened that has ever deflected the even tenor of my way!" she began before she could lay off her bonnet.

We let her tell us of it in her own way, listening as if it were all news to us. Miss Barbara had played her cards well. Without mentioning

my call to my county neighbor and my visit to herself, she had contrived to make her own call upon Miss Snead a simple, natural affair. She had asked Mrs. Morton who she was, after the accidental meeting in the parlor of the latter. Further inquiry made her suspect that she had known Mrs. Snead when they were girls together.

Then she went on to remark in the most friendly way: "'That dear, mischievous minx of a Molly Burwell says I must have known every girl worth knowing in Virginia when I was young, — and forgotten none of them. Your mother was Marcia Bland — wasn't she?'

"I quote literally," cried the narrator, the long nose reddening with the emotion that drove water into her eyes. "I assure you, Molly, that nothing could have been more affectionate than her manner of speaking of you, equivocal though the words may sound in the recapitulation. And the mention of my dear mother's maiden name quite unmanned me!"

The advantage gained was acted upon cunningly. Saturday night saw Miss Marcia and

her trunk securely settled in a chamber adjoining Miss Barbara's own.

"A spacious chamber, dear Mrs. Morton, and supplied with every conceivable comfort!" related the guest, making furtive dabs with her handkerchief at the now brimming eyes. "Imagine an escritoire with drawers and pigeonholes; a noble bronze inkstand, filled with ink, upon it, a ream of writing-paper, and pens laid ready for use! My generous benefactress had even bethought herself to have it placed so that the light would fall over my left shoulder. And shelves in readiness for my little store of books! A superb mahogany wardrobe for my dresses. A handsome bureau — all the drawers empty — for my underwear. And a bed —" laughing with a suspicion of hysterics in broken respiration and falsetto notes in her voice. "You must contemplate it one day, Molly! Miss Allen says her brother-in-law, Major Peachy, maintains that it was built for Og, king of Bashan. It is an heirloom with a history. It has belonged in the Allen family for untold generations.

"Sleep forsook my eyelids that night until the

small hours were far advanced. When it finally overtook me, it was such slumber as visited the Pilgrims in the Delectable Mountains."

"Do you suppose," said I, thoughtfully, to my cousin when our visitor had gone back to her Delectable Mountains, "that our blessèd, incomparable woman has made up the things that starched puppet of a brother-in-law *ought* to say if he were fit to black her shoes, until she really believes she is quoting him, instead of repeating her own *bon mots?*"

"'To make you idols, and to find them clay,'" repeated Cousin Molly Belle. "The second part of the curse has not come to pass. Let us hope it never will. I would rather see a good woman happy in a delusion than bewailing the worship of years."

Before I went to bed, I curled myself up on the rug before my chamber fire and held long converse with Mr. Frederic Sedley. If I have said nothing of him for many pages past, it is not because he was not dearer to me than ever. Sorrow — my first real sorrow — had knit our hearts more closely together. I no longer

addressed him as "Mr. Sedley," after the manner of Sarah of old, "calling him lord," an example dutifully imitated by the Virginia gentlewoman of the day. He was "Frederic," and "my Frederic," and, occasionally, under the pressure of tremendous emotions — "Darling!"

I often said to him and to myself that I could not have borne Marion's death and the thought of Dick's desolation but for my Frederic's sympathy. I made believe to-night that he was in the chair beside me — drawn up to the right spot and at the proper angle for that express purpose. Then I sat me down upon the rug, and fancied that the head laid upon the unresponsive cushioned seat, rested against his knee, while I poured out my soul without reserve and without misgiving. He was never bored by the extravagance of my grief, never contemptuous of the exuberance of my joy.

Oh, my dream lover! for so long my good genius in the Border Land, where the brook and river meet! There is no disloyalty to other and later friends in the thought which flies backward whenever I sing: —

"Over my heart in the years that have flown,
No love like early love ever has shone;
No other worship abides and endures
Faithful, unselfish, and *patient* like yours."

He had need of patience this evening. My heart and my mind were inflated with self-approval. I was immensely proud of my latest and most signal work of benevolence, and absolutely intolerant of the pitiable weakness of an otherwise grand creature whom I had moved to befriend a needy fellow-woman.

Contrasting her and the object of her devotion, as I had seen them last, — the woman in the heart of the fire-glow in her harmonious room, radiating beneficence like a goddess, — and the wisp of a man, his head bowed, his cloak clinging to him as the shell of a walnut about the kernel, scraping the mire from his soles in the public street lest the dampness should strike through and set his sciatic nerves a-going, — I asked Frederic if I could hope to retain respect for a woman I could not help loving. At the risk of shocking his fastidious taste (he *was* fastidious with regard to a woman's use of strong expressions), I said over

again, and aloud, the rhyme as pat as it was vulgar: —

"'There was a lady loved a swine.
'Honey,' said she,
'Pig-hog! wilt thou be mine?'
'Hunc!' said he."

Frederic's hand was toying with my luxuriant chestnut hair, "so luxuriant as almost to weigh down the shapely head."

(That was the way I thought of it then. Let it stand!)

The rhythmic motion was checked as the audacious doggerel passed my lips.

"Gently, gently, dear!" he said, tenderly monitory.

"But, Frederic, he *takes* everything, and gives her nothing! Now, there are those preposterous stockings. I am just as certain as if you had told me (and you could never tell me an untruth), that she has had those ridiculous dozens and dozens of them knit these twenty years — think of it, dearest! twenty years, a thousand-and-one pairs at the lowest computation — knit for him and paid for materials and work, then *given* them

to him! And he has accepted them as if he were doing *her* a favor, that she may not lose sleep in her anxiety over his plaguey old rheumatism! 'Pig-hog' isn't a pretty word for ears polite, I grant. But, I appeal to you, isn't such behavior the quintessence of swinishness?"

"I sadly fear that you are right, love," said my Frederic, reluctantly.

Chapter XIV

"M. P."

"To live in hearts we leave behind
Is not to die."

— *Campbell.*

CHRISTMAS was less than a week off, and I was, as usual, spending Friday evening with Miss Barbara.

Supper was over. The party of four had eaten it in the dining room across the hall from the back parlor in which we were now assembled. I had my own low rocker at the corner of the hearth; the Major, pipe in mouth, was ensconced in his deep elbow-chair, while Miss Barbara sat

at the piano, playing softly a medley of old airs. Miss Marcia, upright as a yellow pine sapling, occupied a straight-backed high chair under the chandelier. A fleecy length of stocking depended from the shining needles. She wrought without looking at the clicking steels, her eyes fixed meditatively upon the fire, her fingers moving with the precision of clock-work. Her handicraft, like her brain-work, was phenomenal.

Her face, as she listened to Miss Barbara's music and seemed to study the scarlet depths of the coals, was curiously softened. It could never be passably comely. I had not believed that bodily ease and the fulfilment of her cherished intellectual ambition could have metamorphosed her into what I was looking at now. The change had been so gradual that I had not appreciated how complete it was.

True, the schoolgirls, with the frank impertinence of their order, had remarked that "Phee had spruced up mightily since she had been staying at Miss Barbara Allen's!"

Her going there had given rise to wondering gossip, until it was known that her mother

had been an early friend of the rich, eccentric spinster.

Her sojourn under the hospitable roof excited no invidious comment after that. Long visits were too common to be surprising.

The improvement in her apparel and general appearance was freely discussed. Miss Barbara judged too justly of her guest's character and prejudices to attempt to fit her out with new clothes. By degrees, the country-made wardrobe was renovated by Cleo's clever fingers. A breadth was added to a skirt; the fashion of sleeves and trimmings was qualified into conformity with the reigning mode; her Sunday bonnet, and what the girls called the "bombazine sugar-scoop" she wore to school, passed into Cleo's hands and were so thoroughly transmogrified — as the unsophisticated wearer believed, by the accomplished Abigail — that nobody would have known them for the same.

"Except," explained Miss Marcia, to our secret gratification, "as there exists a decidedly family likeness between mourning bonnets, by whomsoever fashioned or worn."

Miss Barbara's milliner kept her own counsel, and so did we.

The unconscious victim of the pious fraud wore her best black frock to-night. She had learned in four weeks that dressing for the evening was a social custom, and she was pathetically anxious that no blunder of hers should mortify her benefactress. The said best frock was bombazine, trimmed with crape. In its original form it had been violently unbecoming. With double folds of white *crêpe de lisse* at the wrists, and a stomacher of the same filling in the V-shaped opening below the throat, it detracted from, instead of contributing to, her homeliness.

Viewed as a part of the great change for which I was continually hugging my inner self, I regarded Miss Marcia's costume and her evident *bien être* with interested complacency. Lying back in the cushioned chair that lent itself amiably to each tired joint in the frame of a fast-growing, hard-working schoolgirl, I took sweet counsel with Frederic Sedley, drank in his praises of my benevolent disposition and achievements; talked over my plans for the nearing holidays, and made

daring excursions into the future we were to share so long as we both should live.

All this to the music flowing from Miss Barbara's fingers, — a ripple, rather than a tide, lulling cares to rest, blending with, and making a part of, love reveries.

Passing, without pause or startling transition, from one theme to another, the performer played, at last, *The Last Rose of Summer*, with variations, — some of which were, I suspected, of her own composition, — dying away in a plaintive diminuendo passage, hardly louder than the sigh of the wind without.

"The sweetest air ever written!" said I, as Miss Barbara bent to the grate to warm her fingers.

Her answer made me sorry I had spoken : —

" It is the Maj's favorite."

" Major Peachy's taste is then as admirable in music as in other arts, literature included," said Miss Marcia, inclining her head toward his corner, and receiving a bow in acknowledgment of the compliment.

" How deliciously cosey it is here ! " I essayed to divert the course of the conversation.

That two votaries should burn incense upon the dumb idol's altar was more than my patience could brook.

"How Cowper would have gloried in this room — the fire and the music! If I were a poet, I would write of it. If I were a painter, I would make a picture of it. You, Miss Barbara, should be standing just where you are in the full light. It brings out the lustre of your silk, and your rings and chain, and the wee touch of silver in your hair. Miss Marcia would make a good foil, a little in the background. Hear the sleet against the windows! That was all we needed to perfect our sense of comfort."

Still knitting, and still gazing abstractedly into the fire, Miss Marcia recited with proper emphasis and discretion: —

> "Now, stir the fire and close the shutters fast:
> Let fall the curtains, wheel the sofa round;
> And while the bubbling and loud-hissing urn
> Throws up a steamy column, and the cups
> That cheer, but not inebriate, wait on each —
> So, let us welcome peaceful evening in."

To quote poetry by the line, the couplet, the

stanza, the page, was a polite accomplishment at that date. There was nothing unusual in Miss Marcia's exercise of memory. Three of the party had read Southey's *Life of Cowper* that winter. Talk of books we had enjoyed was also a social exercise.

The Major took his pipe from his lips.

"Very much so!" he uttered, oracularly.

I dashed in again like the malapert I was, to avert analysis and praise of the sapient observation: —

"We are having a real Cowper evening!" I cried. "Here is Mrs. Unwin with her knitting. You know what Lady Hesketh wrote to her sister Theodora about it: 'Her constant employment is knitting stockings, which she does with the finest needles I ever saw; and very nice they are — the stockings, I mean. Our cousin has not, for many years, worn other than those of her manufacture. She knits silk, cotton, and worsted.' And Cowper alludes to this knitting in the last verse he wrote to her. Miss Marcia! you recollect everything; what does he say of Mary's knitting needles?"

The response was prompt. Her fingers did not falter; the thoughtful eyes were not withdrawn from the vari-colored flames dancing over the pile of coal; her enunciation was thrillingly distinct: —

> "'Thy needles, once a shining store,
> For my sake, restless heretofore,
> Now rest, disused, and shine no more,
> My Mary!'"

"By George!" said the Major. His pipe had turned upside down, spilling the ashes upon his knees and the carpet.

"One is prone to forget one's present occupation when absorbed in lofty meditation," said Miss Marcia, springing to the rescue with a hearth brush, and kneeling to sweep up the hot débris he had flicked from his knees with the bandanna handkerchief.

Miss Barbara laughed and reached down a silver tobacco-box from the mantel, which always stood there.

"It was all Cowper's fault — or 'My Mary's'!"

"Don't, for pity's sake, throw any more blame upon her!" exclaimed I. "I can hardly forgive

Lady Hesketh for writing of her to Theodora as 'a dreadful spectacle,' when she had almost killed herself taking care of Cowper all those twenty odd years. And his cousin says, 'Yet within two days she has made our wretched cousin drag her round the garden!' Think how she had slaved for him when he was entirely mad and half-mad; how she sat by calmly and saw him flirt with Lady Austen and pet his dear cousin Lady Hesketh, and put up with his humors when he was said to be sane! I never read or heard of such devotion in another woman who expected nothing in return for it. He *ought* to have married her — and he *wouldn't!*"

"He couldn't, Molly!" Miss Barbara's mellow tones sounded solemn after my excited girlish accents. "And she couldn't *let* him marry her! He was years younger than she, and he had been insane three times. He had no right to marry any woman, much less the woman to whom he owed so much. For my part, I think the history of their intimacy — call it friendship, or call it love, as you will — is far more sacred and beautiful than if they had quieted silly gossip by

becoming plain, humdrum Mr. and Mrs. William Cowper" — this in a lighter strain. "And you, Miss Molly, would not have been half so much interested in the tale. Marriage would have left no romance in it for you. That's the reason all novels end with the wedding-day. Now — go on with your group around the fire! Marcia is Mrs. Unwin, and you are Lady Austen —"

"And you Lady Hesketh — the best of them all!" I interrupted — "if she did call poor, paralytic Mrs. Unwin 'a dreadful spectacle.'"

"And Major Peachy is the gentle, gifted poet, William Cowper!" struck in Miss Marcia from behind me.

She had hung up the hearth-brush, stepped to the dining room to wash her fingers, and now spoke, in entering the parlor. The Major pulled himself up by the arms of his faithful chair, laid his hand upon his heart, and bowed at an angle of forty-five degrees.

"I am flattered beyond my deserts!" he articulated with ponderous gallantry, picking up the lamb's-wool stocking from the table and offering it to her. Miss Marcia dropped a courtesy

and took it, or that part which held the needles. The Major had retained the top and was examining it closely.

"M. P.," he read slowly. "How did you make the letters? Before or after the — ah — rest of the — article was made?"

"While she was knitting it, of course!" cried Miss Barbara, with a burst of gay laughter. "I agree with you that it is cleverly done. I couldn't do it to save my life. My mother could — and all the ladies of her time. Yes! I see that you are about to remind me that Miss Snead belongs to a time three generations later. But she has so many fine, old-fashioned virtues and accomplishments that we forget sometimes."

"I am twenty-eight years of age," said Miss Marcia, in her honest simplicity. "I am no longer a girl, albeit still under tutors and governors — as befits my ignorance."

"Ignorance! Hold your tongue!" ordered Miss Barbara. "The only time you talk like a blockhead is when you provoke us by saying such things."

Then I told of the text Annie Gleason had slipped under my elbow on Opening Day.

Miss Marcia's mulberry blush and deprecatory laugh did not disguise her pleasure. She looked very happy in resuming her seat and taking her needles in hand. The Major hitched his chair a foot or two nearer, and took hold of the stocking leg again.

"M. P.!" he repeated, as if spelling it by the thread. "Well, I declare! I suppose, now, you could have — ah — worked in the whole name if you had wanted to?"

"I could do it, of course!" smiled the knitter. "If you desire it, I will endeavor to knit prænomen and cognomen into the next pair."

"Well — I declare!" reiterated the Major, settling down into his elbow-chair. "That would be — ah — what you might call an achievement. Quite so, in fact!"

He picked up his pipe, refilled it, and spoke not a dozen words more until he bade us "good night" at his regular hour of departure in winter, — ten o'clock.

I slept in a little room opening out of Miss

Barbara's, and she would make me undress by her fire. Her chamber was directly over the back parlor, and of the same size and shape. In the recesses at the sides of the mantel hung two portraits. One was of her sister, Mrs. Peachy, taken in her bridal dress — white satin, draped with rich old lace. A veil of the same lace fell back from her head far below the waist, and was caught up over the left ear with a spray of orange-blossoms.

While we were toasting our toes preparatory to going to bed, Miss Barbara, seeing my eyes stray wistfully to the picture, began to talk of the original. She had never done this to me until now.

"You may well look at her!" she began without preamble. "She was the most beautiful and the happiest creature in the State when she put on that dress for the first time. The lace was imported for our mother's wedding-dress."

"Then *you* ought to have had it!" said I, flatly. "You were the older of the two."

"It was left by will to me. It was at my especial request that Agnes accepted it and had

it put on her wedding-frock — as was but right and proper."

There was nothing in tone or manner to suggest the thought, but it entered my mind and would not be routed. I was morally certain that the lace had been set aside for, and maybe actually sewed upon, Miss Barbara's own bridal gown. I caught myself wondering if she or the dressmaker ripped it off.

She was looking dreamily into the fire. The wind rattled the dead stalks of the white jessamine against the windows. For the want of something else that could be said, I remarked, awkwardly: —

"What beautiful eyes she had!"

Miss Barbara awoke: —

"Glorious! so soft and yet so clear and expressive! When she was two days old, they let me hold her. I was but seven years old, and so proud of the honor! And while I had both arms tight about her for fear of letting her fall, she opened her dear blue eyes wide and stared straight into mine. They say babies are as blind as puppies until they are

nine days old. She looked right at me, I tell you, and smiled! Miracle, or no miracle, it was the truth, as sure as I am sitting here. I was her slave from that minute until I had her last look and closed the beautiful eyes upon all earthly sights."

There was a long silence. The fire sighed; the dead vines tapped upon the panes where snow was beginning to show whitely against the black background.

Miss Barbara began again in the same musing monotone: —

"It almost broke my heart when she was sent abroad to school. Our Aunt Agnes — for whom she was named, our father's sister — had married a New Yorker whose business obliged him to live in Paris. His wife proposed to take Agnes with her and put her to school. Aunt Agnes was a Roman Catholic. I didn't like the idea of a convent. But my father was a very resolute man, and between them they had their way. Agnes was but fifteen. She had slept in my arms ever since she was five. Our mother died then. I shall never have a child,

but I know how mothers feel. I wrote to her every week after they took her from me. I thought of her all day long, and dreamed of her every night. When she was coming home, I had the house painted inside and out, and everything brightened up as if I had expected a queen. When we met I cried for joy harder than I had cried for grief when she went away."

Both of us gazed silently at the figure in bridal array — the fair, smooth face, perfect in doll-like beauty, the smiling blue eyes. Then I turned to the other portrait — that of a dashing, handsome man with dark eyes and hair. A half smile of confident happiness sat well upon his mouth. One shapely hand, laid lightly on the elbow of his chair, held a crimson rose between two fingers.

"Was it a good likeness when it was taken?" I asked timidly, feeling, all the while, that I trod upon unsafe ground.

"Excellent! You cannot see the resemblance, perhaps. I, who have seen him almost every day, hardly notice any change. He was crushed by her death. I promised her to keep him from

laying violent hands on himself. For many months I never saw him smile. But his is too strong a nature to be permanently depressed. As time went on he regained spirits and, to some extent, his interest in life. We seldom speak of what we have lost, but neither of us has ever forgotten it. His heart was buried with Agnes. There is no resurrection for it in this world. Except for ourselves, there is nobody living to cherish her memory."

Her hand stole to my shoulder.

"For the sake of the sweet sister who was more to me than most daughters are to the mothers that bore them, I love young girls. Sometimes" — the firm fingers closing affectionately upon my shoulder — "I get to loving them very dearly for themselves!"

I turned my head to press my lips to her hand.

"*Dear* Miss Barbara! I wish I could do something to show how grateful I am for all your goodness to me, and how dearly I love you!"

"When you say, 'I love you!' you pay every debt you owe me — if there are any! But there isn't one! Now, Mousie, go to bed! I

am a selfish old woman to keep you up until eleven o'clock, listening to my gabble!"

I did not sleep for a long time after she sent me to bed. Through the open door I could see the crimson fire-shine and it wooed me invitingly, — night-hawk that I am. Assured, by listening to Miss Barbara's regular breathing, that she slept, I wrapped a wadded dressing-gown around me, stole into the outer room, and tucked myself up in kittenish fashion in an easy-chair that had been Miss Barbara's grandmother's. There, with the portraits of the handsome bridal pair smiling down upon me, the fire purring drowsily, and the rattle of dead sprays against the glass muffled by the clogging snow, I fell to work, with my Frederic's help, upon the reconstruction of one of my romances.

After all, Miss Barbara's sublime constancy was to the memory of her sister — not to her own love for the man who, rumor said, had jilted her for a younger and prettier girl. The discovery was a great relief to me. I could dwell sympathizingly upon her devotion to Agnes — the more than daughter to the woman who was

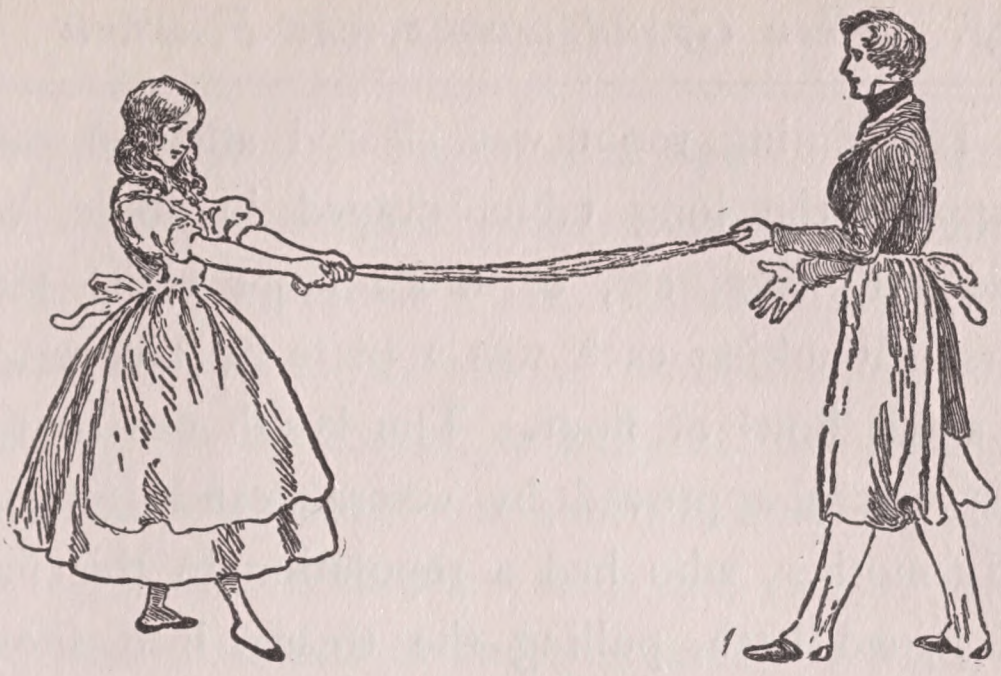
never to hold a child of her own in her arms. I wondered that I had ever laid a stone upon the foundation of old wives' fables. The idea that my brave lady had "loved a swine" (I blushed in recalling the impertinent rhyme!) was preposterous throughout. I even relented in my judgment of the rickety human hulk that had been flattered by Miss Marcia's knitting his initials into the top of a ridiculously long stocking leg. He was a harmless old dandy, dignified into manliness by his sister-in-law's tender thought of the day when he was young and belovèd by her lost darling.

"This is a lesson in the folly of hasty conclusions which both of us will do well to recollect," said Frederic, with characteristic and tactful magnanimity, including himself in a blunder that was mine alone.

The fire had grown too feeble to purr any longer, and I hied me back to pillow and blankets.

That night I dreamed that I made a cap for William Cowper, in pattern like that presented to him by Lady Hesketh and seen in the frontis-

piece to Southey's book. But the material was the lace from Agnes Peachy's wedding-dress, and when I fitted it to the gentle poet's head, he changed to Major Peachy, who said "Hunc!" by way of thanks.



Chapter XV

The Old Year Out

"Well, I'll repent, and that suddenly while I am in some liking. I shall be out of heart shortly, and then I shall have no strength to repent."

— *Henry IV.*

ON the last night of the year we had a "molasses stew." In the language of the Twentieth Century fun-seeker, it would be a "candy pull."

With a fine perception of the true inwardness — the real backbone — of every social function we made the "stew" a prominent feature of the occasion. Those who were to pull the cooked syrup into candy took a hand in the work from first to last.

The dining room was cleared after an early supper; the long table, draped in white, was laid with five, six, or more large china platters. Flanking each was a plate of butter and a small bowl of flour. The lavish use of this last was disapproved by veteran candy makers. My mother, who had a reputation in this line, disdained both, pulling the treacle into snowy whiteness and spongy brittleness with the tips of her slender fingers, with no trouble from stickiness and "strings."

The table was laid by servants, and then the young people took charge. A monstrous bell-metal preserving kettle, bright as new gold within and without, was put upon the hearth and the molasses measured into it. The vinegar which was to facilitate the process was then carefully measured and added, the kettle set upon a strong trivet over a bed of clear red coals, and relays of attendants were appointed to watch the first signs of ebullition, and to prevent, first, boiling over, and next, burning to the bottom of the kettle. Two of these — a man and a woman, or a boy and a girl — stood

over the caldron, long-handled spoons in hands, their clothes guarded from spatter and trickle by wide white aprons. The rest dispersed about the room, chatting, bantering the officiating pair, carrying on flirtations, or genuine love-making, as the case might be — in short, fun-making after the style of a time when cards and dancing were not vital essentials to the enjoyment of healthy, normal youth. We frolicked then spontaneously. Now, we must be entertained artificially.

From the adjoining room the sound of the piano broke occasionally into the jovial din of talk and laughter.

"It brings to mind the slave at the banquet of Glaucus, carving the Ambracian kid to the sound of soft music," said Miss Marcia, in my ear, as I stood a little apart from the rest, watching Dick Carter, who was stirring the bubbling pot under Paulina Hobson's supervision.

"I was just thinking how intensely Virginian is this scene, and how keenly Miss Barbara and the Major would appreciate it. They cherish all the old festive observances, now, alas! fallen into desuetude."

Miss Marcia was the only person I ever knew who said "alas!" in familiar conversation.

I laughed.

"Miss Barbara would, I believe. I cannot fancy the Major at a molasses stew. He would be as much out of his element as a bishop in a ball-room."

Miss Marcia looked pained, and I hastened to modify my candid speech.

"You see, Miss Barbara has kept young, and he hasn't! He seems a century older than she."

"That is the outer man, Molly — the stillness of a deep channel. At heart, he is youthful — far more youthful than might be predicated from his years."

"Maybe so," said I, indifferently.

Major Peachy's heart and his years were far-off and unimportant matters by comparison with what were, to my eyes, and maybe to others, Paulina Hobson's obvious designs upon my cousin. She wore a blue merino trimmed with white. (We never "dressed up" for a molasses stew.) The gown became her astonishingly well.

Her lint-white hair hung in natural curls about the thin cheeks that had a pretty pink flush, natural, or acquired by toilet arts. A full apron made partial amends for no hips to speak of, and her flat chest was ingeniously padded. Dick was almost a doctor. Couldn't he detect her makings-up?

I had sent him the ring left in my care within a week after Marion's death. He had thanked me for it briefly and strongly, and never alluded to it since. I had not met him during the holidays until this afternoon. As soon as he removed his gloves I saw that he wore the ring upon the little finger of his left hand, but — and I comprehended at once why — the ruby heart and clasped hands were turned inward toward the palm. It passed easily with casual observers for an unremarkable, chased ring, with nothing to distinguish it, or to catch the eye above a hundred others. He bore himself gallantly among the merry-makers. Paulina could not complain that he did not second her advances toward a flourishing flirtation. The molasses was so near the critical stage of candying that she was obliged

to instruct him continually as to the right way of stirring.

"The spoon must scrape the bottom every time!" I heard her say as I edged nearer to them to make way for the butler and footman who were buttering dishes and plates preparatory to the pouring-out. "I believe you are afraid of burning your hand! Here, let me show you!"

She seized the upper part of the handle projecting above his hand and pushed it downward, with a vigorous rotary motion.

"*Now!* keep that up!"

An involuntary motion of the left hand, to protect the right from the spatter produced by the energetic stirring, brought the palm into view.

Paulina gave a stifled screech and snatched at it.

"If that isn't a cunning trick! Why do you want to hide your lady-love's heart? Who is she? I won't tell! A Philadelphia belle?"

Dick did not withdraw his hand, but kept on stirring, mumbling something over and over to

himself in an absent-minded way, as if unconscious of her discovery and catechism. She gave the hand she held a pettish shake.

"What's that you are saying? Speak out!"

The mumbling continued, but in a louder tone, audible to others as well as herself.

"I will be good! I will be good!" again and again, in the tone of a terrified child, his eyes dilated in alarm.

"Has he lost his senses?" appealed Paulina, to those about her.

All crowded nearer. Dick stared wildly at the seething mass, now covered with miniature geysers that spat and tumbled and moaned.

"I will be good! I *will* be good! I don't want to go where it's hotter than it is here!"

Gilbert, grinning from ear to ear, appeared at his elbow, and took the spoon with the affectionate familiarity of an old family servant.

"'Scuse me, Mars' Richard! Maybe I'd make a better devil than you would, suh! An' it's ready to po' out now, anyhow."

In the bustle of falling back from the kettle lifted from the fire and carried to the table by

the two colored men, Dick slipped the ring into my hand.

"Keep it for me! I've got to pull with her!" he whispered, and was gone from my side.

In five minutes the pulling was under way, to the accompaniment of little shrieks from the girls and ejaculations of dismay from their partners as the dark-brown mass, detached from the buttered dishes as soon as it could be handled at all, "balled" and "roped" and stuck to unskilful fingers, and had to be treated with butter or flour to avert utter ruin. Manipulated by experts, similar masses grew swiftly into shining golden ribbons, drawn into tenuous lengths between partners, and tossed back with the speed of the sunbeams they resembled as they glistened in the lamplight. They made a graceful play of it — these experts, of whom there were not a few in the party. My mother was eagerly sought as a partner; my father pulled steadily, if more slowly than younger men, with Miss Marcia at the other end of the looped ribbon. I had a college boy, a visitor in the neighborhood, whose awkwardness threw double responsibility

upon me. The long rope was in fair working order before I had leisure to notice who were our neighbors. Paulina Hobson's shrill titter enlightened me:—

"You are the cleverest creature I ever saw! You didn't choose to risk having your heart—a bleeding heart, too! torn out by the roots by hot molasses!"

"I knew my partner would get hold of my heart, by fair means, or by unfair, before she was through with me," returned Dick, lackadaisically, and the small talk rattled on.

When the candy lay in glossy coils and braids —(just the color of Mary 'Liza's hair, as more than one admirer averred)—upon the plates, hands were washed, aprons were laid aside, and the gay company trooped into the parlor where refreshments of divers sorts awaited them. There would be Christmas games, presently, and then we would watch out the old year.

It was half-past eleven, and a lively game of "clap in and clap out" was in progress, when Dick came over to my corner. All my life I have had a *penchant* for corners, when alone or

in company. I cannot think or talk well in the middle of a room, particularly if the room be large. I was tired of trying to put 'Gus Taverno, the college boy from the Valley of Virginia, at his ease "because he was a stranger"; tired of the vapid praise of the older beaux, and disinclined to be patronized by the few really elderly men who asked "what I was doing at school?" So I slipped into a real corner made by a bookcase and the wall, taking Frederic Sedley with me, of course. He and I were talking of Dick — I making believe I was looking up at Frederic as he stood before me, his stately height carrying his head so far above me that I had to lean mine against the wall to see his face — when my cousin's approach made him step aside.

"Say!" said Dick, resting one hand on the bookcase to get down to my ear. "I'm devilish sick of all this! And I want my ring back. I'm lonely without it! I want you to put it on for me in the room — where she gave it to you! I want to be there when the clock strikes twelve. Do this for me, Molly!"

"They are going to play blindman's-buff next," I said in the guarded tone he had used. "I heard Paulina ask them to do it just now." I smiled rather maliciously, fancying I knew whom she could contrive to have catch her.

Dick moved restively.

"Paulina Hobson be — *dished!* Molly, you'll make me say something you'll be sorry to hear if you try that sort of thing on me to-night."

I sobered instantly.

"I was about to say that we can slip out without being noticed while they are playing that. I will meet you in the upper hall. You'd better get away now — or you'll be caught!"

For Paulina's green eyes had espied him, and I saw her sidle in our direction, looking the other way as she moved.

Before I followed Dick in his successful retreat I sought my mother. Dick and I were more like brother and sister than like cousins, and we had often played by the long winter day in the room occupied by Mary 'Liza and myself. Moreover, when I was young the bedroom was not hedged about with the conventions that guard

it now. Perhaps because two or three usually slept in one room, and in the country we had but one state drawing room in the house, and that was not used every day. "Mother's chamber" was the general sitting room. Yet some instinct belonging to the "Border-land" guided me to the safest of counsellors.

It lacked ten minutes of twelve as I got to her.

"Mother," I said, leaning over the back of her chair and speaking low and fast. "Dick wants to see the room where Marion died. Would there be anything wrong in my taking him upstairs?"

She raised her eyes as frankly as if I were four, instead of fourteen years old.

"Not at all, my dear. But I would not stay more than a few minutes, as questions may be asked. You will probably find Marthy there; I told her to sit up for you girls. I did not like to keep one of the younger maids up so late. If Marthy is asleep, let her alone. If she is awake, tell her I would like to speak to her."

The trusty maid was on guard, and so fast asleep upon a low stool in a corner by the

hearth that her head was doubled over upon her knees.

The chimney was heaped with blazing logs, but the red glow did not hinder us from seeing that the moonlight lay in a broad, slanting track across the room from the east window to the bed, just as it did the night Marion gave me the ring.

I had written to Dick of this, and I knew that he thought of it now. He crossed the floor to the bed and knelt down. One outstretched arm embraced the pillow where her head had lain. I bowed my face upon my hands, standing between him and Marthy, to screen him should she awake.

I was praying fervently for strength to say to him what conscience dictated as a duty to him and to the saint who had loved him to the death.

While he knelt and I stood, the great clock in the lower room struck twelve. Without other movement Dick held out his left hand, and I restored the ring to its place. Before he arose he kissed the pillow and stroked it lovingly. Then we left the room together. Marthy had not stirred, even when the clock struck.

There was no light in the upper hall except

what poured in a silvery stream through the end window near the stairhead. I laid my hand on Dick's arm and stayed him there. My lips were suddenly dry and stiff. It was not so easy to perform my mission as I had believed it would be when I rehearsed my speech to Frederic Sedley last night.

"Dick, dear!" I faltered.

He glanced down and must have detected the tears in my eyes, for I could see that his glistened in the moonlight. He put a brotherly arm about me: —

"Yes, Molly! you loved her very dearly. You were with her at the last. You have been true to her and true to me throughout. God bless you for it! Don't try to talk, dear! There are some things we can't put into words."

"But, Dick, I must!" cried I, fastening upon the hand that wore the ring and feeling strength return to my heart as I touched it. "I won't keep you long. Somebody — several people — have told us lately that you are not living as you should — as *she* would have had you live, Dick!

— that you are *drinking!*" — bringing out the word with a lunge — "drinking *hard!* — that, unless you pull up you will throw yourself away — your talents and your hopes of a profession — and will break your mother's heart. Dear cousin! say that this is not true!"

An awful pause ensued. From below-stairs the sound of congratulations and good wishes arose in a tumultuous murmur. Then, somebody went to the piano,— I knew, afterward, it was Mary 'Liza — and played *Old Hundred* in full chords, her foot upon the loud pedal. Before Dick answered, twenty voices took up the strain:

> "*Praise God from whom all blessings flow!*
> *Praise Him, all creatures here below;*
> *Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;*
> *Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!*"

Dick turned away from the lighted window, and stood with head bent upon his breast, his face in the shadow. The tears ran fast over my cheeks. Neither of us moved until the last note died away, and the people downstairs began to talk again.

"I suppose *she* is singing it with the rest of them *up there!*" said Dick, in a muffled voice, lifting his face again to the white moonlight.

"For *her* sake, Dick!" I sobbed.

He gripped both of my hands hard.

"I'll *try* — Molly! But you don't know — no woman ever *can* know what a man has to battle with! There was I, alone, homesick, broken-hearted, despairing! I *had* to work! I had to mingle with men and seem like them. I must get strength from somewhere. And when a fellow's drunk he forgets for an hour or two. That's something when all the rest of his life is to be one bitter memory!"

"But you'll try again, Dick? I have your promise?"

"You have my promise, little cousin. Here's the seal!"

He pressed my fingers to the ruby heart, then raised them to his lips.

"Well! I declare!" cackled Paulina Hobson, from the stairs. "How very romantic — and loverlike!"

"'FOR *HER* SAKE, DICK!' I SOBBED."

She had stolen up like a cat, and now spat like one.

Blind with rage and confusion, I dashed off to my room. As I closed the door I heard Dick's gay laugh and the words that went with it: —

> "When a pretty woman shows her rings,
> What can a fellow do?"

Chapter XVI

My First Taste of Fame

"Defend me, therefore, Common Sense, say I,
From reveries so airy, from the toil
Of dropping buckets into empty wells,
And growing old in drawing nothing up."

— *Cowper.*

A STRANGE thing and a notable happened soon after our return to school in January.

In order to tell it aright, I must go back a few weeks in my story.

A passenger vessel, on her way from a Southern port to New York, was stranded by a storm upon a reef, where she was beaten to pieces by the surf. Many lives were lost — among them

several distinguished Southern citizens and people of note from other parts of the country. One of these — as the Lady Superior informed us with much real feeling — was an intimate friend of General Nunham.

"They were at school and college together, and were afterward brothers-in-arms."

So impressed were we by the story as sketched by her and the particulars given by the newspapers, that the Generalissimo's absence from the morning Bible reading, as a token of respect to his old comrade, provoked no irreverent criticism. I lay awake long that night and the next, as was my wont when my imagination was stirred. The papers had described the scenes on board of the doomed vessel, as billow after billow swept her deck, — when, in the graphic language of Luke, the beloved author-physician, "all hope that they should be saved was taken away." A venerable clergyman, once a Richmond pastor, had gone from group to group with words of holy confidence and exhortation, reminding his fellow-passengers that this last rough stage of their voyage would be mercifully short, and that

the suffering was not worthy to be compared with the glory almost shining upon their sight. Much stress was laid upon the circumstance that the bell of the steamer, attached to that portion of the hulk which was wedged in among the rocks, rang for days, as the waves surged back and forth over and through the broken timbers, and when no human thing was left alive upon the wreck.

The thought of that knell fastened upon my imagination. I lived the scene over in every phase while I tossed in feverish unrest from midnight until dawn. The cruel billows, returning ruthlessly to their work when, in each recession, they carried off a struggling man, woman, or child to certain death; the calm front of the man of God — who, I recollected, had baptized my baby brother upon a visit to our country church — lifted to the inclement heavens as if he already saw them opening to show the glory to be revealed; the roll and swing and toll of the bell — were as real as if known through the medium of my natural senses.

When, at last, I fell asleep, it was to dream of an angry sky and an angrier sea, of drowning

men, and intervening angels stooping to the wreck, and bearing freed spirits beyond the reach of storm and sorrow; and, above the tumult of surf and wind and dying screams, arose the "toll! toll! toll!" of the passing bell.

I tried to write it down in verse. What I felt and dreamed was poetry, and of no mean order. Of course, the thing born of a night and a day of travail was not many degrees higher in merit than the verses wrought out by the eight-year-old, while pacing the garden walk in the summer twilight, with the dying flower for inspiration. The afflatus was genuine. The failure was in my vocabulary.

Before going to school next day I copied my "poem" in my neatest hand, signing my name below — and in less firm characters: —

"*Respectfully dedicated to General E. R. Nunham.*"

This is what was written above signature and dedication: —

"A solemn knell peals o'er the deep,
A wild and fearful sound,
Above the wind's tumultuous sweep
And the white waves' restless bound.

The tide flows high, and louder still
Swells out the deep-toned knell;
'Tis echoed from the rocky hill
And ocean's lowest cell.

"Toll on! toll on! Beauty and pride,
Manhood's vigor, youthful bloom,
And hoary age lie side by side,
In one engulfing tomb.
The ocean's roar breaks not their sleep,
What boots its rage to them?
Peaceful they rest beneath the deep,
Thy knell their requiem."

Watching my opportunity, I contrived to meet Mrs. Nunham in the hall at the close of the morning session, and gave the folded paper into her high-bred hand. I was all a-tremble with nervous excitement, and the words hung and tripped over one another upon my tongue.

"Here is something I have written," said I, short of breath, and feeling a flame kindle more hotly in my cheeks with every word. "What you told us the other day put it into my head. Nobody else has seen it. I hope General Nunham won't think I have taken a great liberty!"

She was gravely non-committal, as was to be

expected, looking from the paper to my red face in polite inquiry: —

"I am to give this to General Nunham?"

"If you think it good enough when you have read it!" with a foolish little cough, and then I took to my heels, unable to escape in any other fashion.

She detained me for a moment as I was passing her desk during the afternoon session. Her manner was gracious, her voice low that no one else might hear: —

"General Nunham wishes me to thank you for the compliment paid to him in the dedication of your poem. We are extremely pleased with it. The feeling that dictated it and the expression of that feeling are alike creditable to your heart and to your head."

With which well-turned phrase the matter was closed for her, or so I thought. I had never spoken of it to any one, not even to Cousin Molly Belle, and I was not presumptuous enough to think that the poem — a frigate of the line to me — could be anything more to the Lady Superior than a chip in a wayside puddle.

When, therefore, Miss Serena came to me one stormy January afternoon as I sat in the deserted recitation room, conning a French lesson, with the message that Mrs. Nunham wished to speak to me upstairs, nothing was further from my mind than the idea that she had anything to say of my "poem."

"You need not look so startled!" smiled Miss Serena. "There is nothing unpleasant in store for you. Quite the reverse."

I *was* startled, and no doubt betrayed my discomposure when, having been conducted to Mrs. Nunham's private sitting room, I beheld the Generalissimo planted in the exact middle of the hearth-rug, his back to the fire, hands down, and in his most fixed "attention" attitude. He inclined his head slightly as I courtesied, but made no other movement.

"Sit down, my dear!" Madame said kindly, indicating a chair placed at a conversational angle to her own.

When I obeyed, she proceeded, with increasing affability, to relate that she had shown my "clever poem" to a friend of General Nunham,

— "a family connection, in point of fact" — and a musical composer of some note. He had thought so well of the verses that he had set them to music. The song, thus accompanied, had been accepted by a music publisher in Baltimore, and would be issued shortly.

"With your permission?" concluded Madame, her deferential gesture robbing me of the poor remnant of self-possession spared by the astounding intelligence. All the blood in my body was slowly draining into my heart. The alarum deafened me, sounding in my brain like a drum, beaten fast and loud.

The Lady Superior's smile was benignant and encouraging: —

"The General and I agree in the opinion — based upon this and other productions — that you have talent of a high order. I voice your sentiments with mine, I believe, General?" she interrupted herself to say, turning toward him.

The General raised one stiff hand to his blue-black chin.

"Of a high order!" he repeated in a dry bass voice. "Very much so!"

"Talent which should be cultivated," pursued Madame.

Intonation and air conveyed her conviction that the publication of the poem set to music by the General's friend, and dedicated to the General, was a vast stride in the direction of that cultivation. So marked was the implication that the General felt it as another appeal to himself.

"Cultivated!" said the dry bass echo. "Very much so!"

In a flash the recollection of the Major's "Quite so!" awoke my sense of the ridiculous, and my wits returned to me, as truth answered the prick of Ithuriel's spear. What wouldn't I give to be the eavesdropper to a dialogue between the two "brothers-in-arms"?

My voice and what my colored Mammy called my "manners," were in hand.

"You are very kind," I answered gratefully, and without having to clear my throat. "It is a great surprise and a great honor that you and General Nunham should think well of my humble verses. The subject — and your talk

— inspired me. I should be ungrateful and rude and insincere were I to object to the publication."

"Thank you!" said the Lady Superior, apparently as sincerely as I had spoken. "Now, as to the signature! You spoke of that, I believe, General? You thought it important?"

The General's hand went up again. I believe, still, it began the ascent with the intention of a military salute, but it stopped, as before, at his chin.

"Very much so!" the bass dry now to grating.

"Your own name —" Madame began.

I interposed in a genuine panic: —

"Oh, no! I could not think of that for —"

"Years to come!" I was on the point of saying when I stopped short. For, within the last five minutes I had taken a resolution from which I was never to swerve. I would cultivate my talent. I would be an AUTHOR!

Not for worlds would I admit this to my nearest of kin and dearest of heart. I could as soon have revealed the existence of Frederic

Sedley and my relations with him. To see my real name in print would shame me as at the discovery of gross indelicacy.

"I appreciate your modesty," Madame was pleased to observe. "And we approve of it."

The General's hand quivered, but did not rise.

"Then — what do you say to 'Words by a Young Lady,' as being definite, yet modest?" she continued.

Here the most astonishing episode in the whole wonderful interview occurred. The General stroked his chin with his right hand, then with his left — *then* — opened his mouth and spake as a man, of his own accord!

"Of Richmond, Virginia!"

The dry bass was three tones lower in the register.

Madame surveyed him with loving admiration:

"Admirable, as usual, General! Your judgment is always infallible. We will forward the manuscript to Baltimore this evening, thus inscribed."

With a few more pleasant words she dismissed

me. I went downstairs and into the street, walking upon air.

Byron's sneer —

"'Tis pleasant, sure, to see one's self in print — " is the coarse version of a fine truth. To have his thought made visible is the nearest approach an embodied immortal can have to seeing his astral self with his natural eyes. My material body danced homeward upon wingèd heels. Mary 'Liza had not waited for me, and at this I rejoiced. She would have thought me crazy, and I could not have talked to her, or to any one, until my brain found its equilibrium.

Cousin Molly Belle met me in the hall. Dinner was over, and she was wondering uneasily at my prolonged absence.

"Why, Namesake!" she cried at sight of my face, "what has happened? You look glorified!"

I threw myself into her arms and burst into a flood of happy tears.

Her delight and sympathy when my tale was told were a foretaste of a blissful week. The story of the song and what was to be done with

it ran quickly through the school and was talked of in the city. Richmond was a small town, then, compared with the rising city of the New South, and small matters were of weight. A local paper had an item concerning "a promising pupil in one of our best-known and deservedly popular Young Ladies' Seminaries. Her lyric is said by competent judges to evince poetic talent — if not genius — of a high grade of excellence. A few more exhibitions of this sort, and the slander that the South has no literature of her own will be silenced forever and — to borrow a commercial phrase — 'nailed to the counter.'"

I sent a copy of the paper to my father. I cut out the "item" from another paper and laid it away under cotton wool in my jewellery-case, replacing above the cotton the locket that had been my grandmother's, and an old-fashioned brooch in which I had put a lock of Marion Cunningham's hair in place of a stiff white wisp that had grown upon the poll of a great uncle who had died before I was born.

The commotion in the little pool of my world

had subsided, and everybody but myself had ceased to think of the pebble that had caused it, when I was thrown into a more lively twitter by another incident connected with my talent and its cultivation. The composer who had considered my verses worthy of being married to his music was to be in town for a day or two, and the Nunhams were to lionize him at an evening party — part *conversazione*, part musicale.

"None of the day scholars are to be invited — with one exception!" said Miss Dorothy, who called in person to explain verbally to Mary 'Liza why she was not included in the invitation to the Mortons, and why I was.

"She should meet Mr. Hewlett, you know," said the good-natured younger of the "joint children." "As the author of the song to which he has written such exquisite music, she is naturally an interesting personage to him. He will sing the song during the evening from the original manuscript. Miss Molly will be one of the stars of the occasion. Her presence will not excite invidious comment on the part of other young ladies who have not been invited."

I was the youngest guest, by, I should think, ten years, in the drawing-room on the memorable evening. Never having heard myself spoken of as a personage until the word was rounded by Miss Dorothy's lips, I had been trying to live up to the trisyllable ever since. Uncomfortable heats rise to my forehead to this day in recalling the absurd height to which injudicious compliments and my own vanity had raised me. I grow hotter in confessing that Byron's words — "I awoke one morning and found myself famous" — were in my mind while preparing body and mind for the composite *soirée* to which the music-loving fashionists of Richmond were bidden. Cousin Molly saw to it that my dress of white *challé*, trimmed with cherry ribbons, was simple as became my years. My hair was dressed in two long braids tied with the same ribbon. My white shoes were rosetted with cherry color, and I had my first pair of long white kid gloves, coming halfway up to my elbows. If my guardian suspected the extravagance of my anticipation, she betrayed suspicion by neither word nor look. If she divined

what was to be the awakening, she judged it best to let the lesson speak for itself.

The assembly was large, and looked brilliant. Well-dressed men paid diligent attention to women, most of whom were elegant and many of whom were beautiful. Cousin Molly Belle was always a popular figure in social gatherings, and Miss Barbara Allen had her own following. I sat or stood in the shadow of one of the two, unnoticed by strangers, addressed kindly and briefly by the few who chanced to recognize me. I should have had a stupid time of it but for my dear Frederic, by far the best-clothed and most knightly man in the room, but never straying far from me lest he should miss one feature of my "triumph." That is what I was so besotted in my fatuousness as to call it. I was reading *Corinne* in the original, and reached the acme of conceit in reminding myself of her as Mr. Hewlett, who looked more like a merchant than a musician, seated himself at the piano and ran his supple fingers over the entire stretch of the keyboard in a dashing prelude. He sang one, two, three, four songs of his own composing,

then several popular ballads, all of which were applauded with flattering enthusiasm.

He had arisen as if to leave the instrument, when Miss Dorothy tripped forward and whispered something in his ear. A low-toned colloquy was closed by his left hand beginning a sonorous imitation of a tolling bell far down in the bass notes. General Nunham advanced to the end of the piano and struck a martial attitude. I tingled to my toes and finger-tips. I had copied the music from a manuscript Miss Dorothy had engrossed from Mr. Hewlett's original, and I had played it over until every note was mine. I could sing it to-day, and manage the ingenious bell accompaniment, although I have not seen it in half a century. Through my imagination careered stories I had heard of calls for "Author!" as the curtain fell upon the last act of a successful play. My inveterate turn for the grotesque even recalled the success of Romeo and Juliet under Mr. Vincent Crummles's managership when Nicholas Nickleby led Miss Snevellicci on and divided the honors with her. I braced myself to

support an ovation with becoming modesty, and to stand beside Mr. Hewlett "with sparkling eyes and glowing cheeks, but in marvellous composure for one so young." Thus I forecast the editorials which would certainly appear in to-morrow's *Whig* and *Enquirer*.

As the last chords died away, a decorous modicum of applause followed. Miss Barbara —from the other side of the room, where she towered up tall above the other women (the Major at her elbow, looking like a miniature replica of the General) — smiled across at me. Cousin Molly, standing nearer, looked her sympathy, and nodded brightly. Nobody else manifested the least interest in the authorship of the words. Mr. Hewlett got up from the piano-stool and began chatting with those about him upon various topics. Not once during the evening did he approach me, and nobody offered to introduce him to the little girl in white and cherry color. The Nunhams had too many other things to think of; and, after the manner of his guild, Mr. Hewlett had too much to think of himself to cast a look or idea in the direction of

a nobody. The words were but the scaffolding of his notes and bars. Whatever of reputation might be begotten of *The Bell of the Steamer Atlantic* was his, and his alone.

In the intensity of my chagrin at the ignominious reel and crash of my beautiful structure, I could have crept under the piano to hide from the laughing, gabbling, selfish throng, rustling in silks, draperied with laces, and smelling of French perfumery. The Event of the evening to me was not even an episode to them.

"You know" — kind Miss Serena was saying so close to me that I heard her gentle tones through all the babble of other voices — "that the last ballad he sang was his own composition. The words were written by one of our pupils, and dedicated to our father."

"Indeed!" said one woman.

Another — "How gratifying!"

And a man's drawling voice — "I didn't catch the words! Indeed, nobody ever thinks of listening to the words of a song, even if they are pronounced distinctly. Usually, one can't tell

whether they are Choctaw or Italian. What was this one about, anyhow?"

A wave of the crowd swept between him and me. If he had the story of the words he had not heard, it did not move him to seek out the author; for neither he nor any curious or interested person said a syllable to me of my share in the ballad which was to have been the feature of the evening. If I were one of the stars of the occasion, it was of the sixteenth magnitude and hidden behind a cloud.

I was too tired to talk on the way home. Cousin Molly Belle leaned back in her corner of the carriage, and let me sulk in mine. Cousin Frank was at home before us, and came out to open the carriage-door. He had had a business engagement.

"Did you have a pleasant evening?" he asked his wife, as we went up the steps.

"Hum-m! take it all together, not wildly hilarious! Mr. Hewlett sang and played a good deal and very well. But, like many another musician, he is nothing else—consequently very stupid and conceited. How long have you been in?"

I slipped behind them and ran up to my room. Mary 'Liza slept the sleep of the unambitious. The brown merino she was to wear next morning hung upon the back of a chair; her underclothing was disposed across the seat of the same in the order in which each piece was to be put on; her shoes were upon the floor before the chair, the toes turned out. Neck ribbon and hair ribbon were folded small on the bureau with a fat book atop of them to take out the creases. I stood and looked at her fair, smooth face, and envied her with all my might! Never, in all her well-ordered existence, would she have the hard, hot pain in the core of her heart that now gnawed at mine, — too hard and too hot to accept the solace of tears.

"And this —" I growled aloud and savagely, "is my first taste of Fame!"

Many, many years thereafter, a dear young friend, whose bright social and artistic career was to be broken by a tragical death, contrived a surprise that was to be a triumph for my unworthy self. She set some verses of mine to music of her own composing, without giving me any

intimation of her intention. By her contrivance, the most famous baritone of the season came forward in the course of a brilliant social function — a musical *soirée* worthy of the name — and announced a new song now to be sung for the first time, naming the hostess as the composer of the music, and myself as author of the words.

The music was exquisite, and he sang divinely, enunciating each word with clearness worthy of an accomplished elocutionist.

The noble music hall, the fashionably attired, listening crowd sitting upon gilded chairs; the superb tapestries, beyond which one had a vista of corridors and drawing-rooms and picture gallery — vanished as a dissolving view. I was again the neglected, bitter-hearted little girl in the white *challé* frock and cherry ribbons, with the salt ooze of disappointment upon her lips.

Now — I expected nothing, rating at its proper value the sugared froth of conventional compliments several of the company took pains to offer when the musical part of the entertainment was over. I was serene and complacent in the

consciousness that my thanks meant no more to them than their congratulations to me.

When the frank-faced baritone began to praise the words of the ballad after I had thanked him for the honor his masterly rendition had done them, I checked him. Briefly, as befitted place and time, I told him the story of that evening of my first "Triumph" — the evening when the truest thing I heard was what the man with the drawling voice said: —

"Nobody ever thinks of listening to the words of a song!"

Chapter XVII

Wedding Favors

"'Twas but a dream — let it pass — let it vanish like so many others !
What I thought was a flower is only a weed and is worthless."

— *Longfellow.*

SPRING was coy in her advance upon Winter that year. Walking in the Capitol Square one Friday afternoon in mid-March, I detected a breath of frost in the air that boded ill for budding maples and flowering fruit trees. But the grass was of a tender emerald, and the sky clear blue. Presently I would wend my way up-town.

Cousin Molly Belle had given me a commission or two to attend to on the way to Miss Barbara's where I was due at supper-time — and as long before that hour as I could manage to be there. My habit of giving Friday evening to her had never been laid aside.

I was thinking of Miss Barbara as I strolled along the upper terrace of the Square on the sunny side of the Capitol. Except for a few children and nurses basking upon the southern slope of the hill, I had the promenade to myself. Something in the day, bright and benignant, yet crisply bracing, reminded me of her. Miss Marcia had brought a message to me from her that morning. I was to be sure to come to supper, and, if possible, to stay all night. This last I could not do. I had returned word to her to this effect, but she need not send me home. My cousin Dick Carter was in town. I was to go to a concert with him, and he would take me back to his sister's when this was over. Dick had run on to Richmond for a three days' furlough. He had been working too hard and looked jaded and thin. He had arrived

on Wednesday, and although I had seen little of him I had enjoyed that little. His gentle, almost subdued manner accorded better with my ideal sincere mourner than had the reckless gayety of Christmas-tide. When he invited me to go to the concert with him I accepted rapturously, and Cousin Molly Belle was more pleased and gratified than was usual even with her. Dick had told me that he had no confidante of his hidden sorrow beside myself. I felt sure that his sister knew of it. The loving solicitude that troubled the depths of her sweet eyes when they rested upon him — her best-belovèd brother — had a deeper origin than consideration for his health. I was also assured that she was glad to have him go out with me for an hour's diversion from sad thoughts and for solace in the music he loved.

My heart was very full of self-gratulation in the thought of the good influence I exerted upon him, the pleasure Miss Barbara took in my company, and of the continual benefaction I was to Miss Marcia. As the Spring opened the latter bourgeoned into likeness to normal, healthy, young ladyhood. Besides being the prize pupil

in every one of her classes, she dressed and behaved — as her brutally impertinent mates informed her — "more like folks and less like a Phenomenon." They still called her "Phee," but ridiculed her no longer. She had come down from her stilts in conversation; she had had her Spring frocks made by a regular mantua-maker; she begged to be allowed to do Miss Barbara's marketing and did it well, leaving home half an hour earlier every morning for this purpose. On several occasions she had brought roses to school with her, purchased from a flower stand in the Sixth Street market. These she kept in a vase upon her desk, smilingly but firmly refusing to part with one of them to the importunate beggars for "just one teeny rosebud."

"Stingy old thing!" ejaculated Annie Gleason, after pleading in vain for a glorious Luxembourg tea-rose that looked, as she declared, "sweet enough to eat." "But I forgive you! I know who gives them to you. I've found you out!"

To my amazement Miss Marcia colored so furiously as to start the water to her pale eyes, and her simper was an embarrassed failure.

Annie clapped her hands and pointed a detective finger at her.

"Look! look! I knew I was right! Girls! Phee has a beau! It's old Mr. Vinton — clerk of the market. I heard father say that his wife died just before Christmas. A very respectable old fellow he is, they tell me. He has held his office since the year One, and must have laid up money. You might do worse, Phee!"

Miss Marcia's face was like the heart of a mangel-wurzel beet by now, and I interposed, patting my *protégée's* angular shoulder patronizingly: —

"Let her alone, Annie! She will look higher. I'm in her confidence!"

Whereat Miss Marcia turned suddenly to wind her long arms about my waist and to hide her face on my breast. A champion was still a delightful novelty to her. The situation was awkward in itself, and the girls' laughter added to the unpleasantness, but I bore up bravely. It was noble to bear ridicule for self-righteousness' sake.

There was certainly nothing in the crisp kisses

of the March breeze to recall the absurd scene to me, but I was smiling over it at the tenth turn of the terrace, when somebody called, "Molly, *oh*, Molly Burwell!" and a gorgeous apparition ran toward me, holding out two white-kid hands.

She wore a changeable silk dress — purple and gold; her short cloak was white, as was her bonnet. Had she been placarded "Bride" in letters a foot long, her recent nuptials would not have been more conspicuously advertised.

"Sidney Page!" I cried in amazed recognition.

"Mrs. Thomas Garlick, if *you* please!" — with the petulant grimace I recollected so well. "Tom! come here!" This to a man loitering sheepishly at the other end of the path. "Miss Molly Burwell, — Tom, — my week-old husband!"

Tom's bashful laugh was a bleat, worthy of a wealthy and well-fed wool grower.

"Happy to meet you, Miss Burwell! Have often heard Sid — Mrs. Garlick — talk about you!"

He was a big fellow with broad shoulders and a brick-red face. In baring his head he revealed a

thick thatch of gingery hair. He, too, wore white gloves. They gave his hands the aspect of canvas-covered Smithfield hams. His clothes were blatantly new; the black satin vest was embroidered in a pattern of pink-and-blue morning-glories. As the pair stood in the unflattering March sunshine, nurses and children huddled into an admiring group and gaped and pointed at the "bridal couple."

"How surprised you look!" Sidney rattled away, hardly waiting to receive my incoherent congratulations. "Didn't you see IT in the papers? We had IT put in all of them."

"It" had escaped my eye, as I told her, and that I thought it strange none of the schoolgirls had mentioned it.

She was visibly disappointed.

"That's all friends are worth! I counted upon being a nine days' talk; at least I had a right to expect it after all the rumpus there was last year over that affair with Len Brooks. Tom! did I ever tell you that this sarcastic young lady called him 'Babbling Brooks'?"

Tom bleated again.

"Pretty good, I declare!"

His wife gave him a little shove:—

"Run along, honey, and smoke a cigar over yonder!" pointing to the lower grounds. "Molly and I want to have a little chat all alone by ourselves. I'll beckon to you when you can come back. So keep an eye on me.

"Not that it's necessary to tell him that!" she continued, Tom having made his bow and walked off, feeling in one pocket for a cigar, in another for a match. "He's so afraid of losing me again that he makes a bigger goose of himself than Nature made him, and he'll never set James River on fire. If he could, he wouldn't suit me."

She slipped her hand into my arm and we began to pace the terrace in the old, old way. Sidney heaved a semi-sentimental sigh.

"How natural it is to be walking here with you! I was perfectly crazy to have you for one of my bridesmaids, but Aun' Parke wouldn't hear of it. She and Unc' Parke had got it into their heads that you were mixed up in that elopement scrape, and nothing could drive it out."

"You *did* mean to elope, then; you said nothing to me about it that Saturday evening!"

"Was just afraid to, child! Len said you might be useful to us in some way when I told him how romantic and poetical and all that sort of thing you were. But I knew you had strict notions about obedience and telling the truth in season and out of season. You mightn't have told on us and spoiled our fun, but you wouldn't lie to help us along. So we made up our minds to run away to Washington on our own hook, as you might say. I packed my trunk that Sunday night when, as Providence had it, Sue Patton was away, visiting her sister. Big Belle says she entered my room on that fatal Monday morning accidentally, and accidentally found that my trunk was locked, and accidentally looked out of the window and spied me and Len at the gate. Accidental cat's foot! She smelled a mouse then, and Unc' Parke had smelled another in Hanover on Sunday, and they put their heads together just in time to pitch all our fat into the fire. Job — the Nunhams' dining-room servant, you know

— had been paid five dollars by Len to get my trunk downstairs that evening while they were all at supper, and had the promise of five more when the trunk was on the carriage and we in it. It was beautifully arranged!"

"You are not sorry the plan failed?" demanded I, for she had sighed again — a whole long sigh.

"No-o-o! not exactly sorry! Yes — honey pie!"

This to Tom who, a hundred yards away, had thrown a kiss to her. She returned it from the tip of a white-kidded forefinger.

"Not sorry, of course. But I always had a hankering after an elopement, and there is something fascinating in being courted by a really wicked man. I tell *you* there was a row with Unc' and Aun' Parke, and the Nunhams, and all! I ain't overly thin-skinned, but some of the fire and brimstone went through to the quick. I got right ill with it all, and Aun' Parke took me travelling until I was over the worst of it. She certainly was mighty good to me. She took me to New York on our way

home, and let me buy loads of new clothes and things. There wasn't another girl in the county who had a nicer wardrobe. Then she gave me a beautiful 'turning-out party,' and everything went as smooth as oil. Of course I was as smart as she, and saw through it all. But it showed me how much I really cared for what the good books call 'pomps and vanities,' and that I wasn't willing to live without them —

"I do declare that fool boy has smoked that cigar clean out, and is motioning to ask if I ain't most ready! He smokes like a kitchen chimney!"

She put her fingers to her mouth and went through the pantomime of lighting a cigar. Tom nodded, and dived again into his pockets.

"He is well trained!" I remarked.

"He'd better be! I led him a dance when he tried to warm up the old soup. I was bound to get some satisfaction out of somebody for what I'd gone through with. I meant all the time to marry him as much as Aun' Parke meant to have me do it. Well! I had my

fling and trained him, as you say, while I was doing it. When he'd follow me at my call, and 'come in' and 'down charge' and all the rest of the dog tricks, I said, 'yes.' Aun' Parke gave me a splendid outfit — clothes and linen and furniture — and a bang-out wedding, and here we are on our bridal-*tower!* I nearly killed myself laughing at Tom's face when I made him believe that the trunk my best dresses were packed in was the same I meant to take with me if I had run away with Len Brooks. He got quite dangerous! I think he would have chopped it to pieces if I had not undeceived him. By the way, do you ever see or hear anything of our particular friend, Babbling Brooks?"

"He was never my friend!" She might not mind referring to the scandalous passage in her life, but I did, and showed that I did. "I see him now and then on the street."

"Does he ever ask after me?" — in genuine curiosity that had not a trace of sentiment in it.

"I never speak to him."

"Humph! How does he look? Battered?" — chucklingly.

"He always looked like a battered blackguard!" with rising spirit. "Every year tells upon a man of his stamp. He begins to look old."

"Poor fellow! He must have been horribly mortified! I've no doubt he was teased out of his senses by men who hadn't such reputations as lady-killers as he had. I'd like to laugh over the affair with him. Tom swears with a double '*d*' that he'll horsewhip him if he ever so much as bows to me on the street.

"Good gracious! can that be five o'clock striking? I must go! We leave for the North to-morrow morning. I'm mighty glad we happened to meet you. Funny, wasn't it? I'd like to have you pay me a visit sometime, but I suppose 'twouldn't be quite safe as long as there's any danger of Unc' Parke's cutting me out of his will if I do anything to make him mad. We've got to look out for the loaves and fishes, you know; and he thinks you're to blame for most of my carryings-on with poor Len. He told

Aun' Parke that you were the brazenest young one he'd ever seen, in court or out.

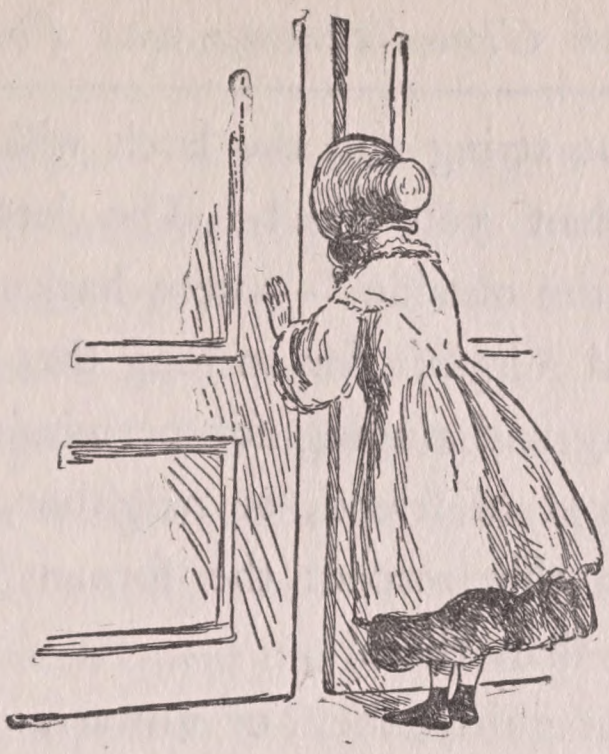
"Now, I must really whistle up my pointer and be off. We're going to the theatre to-night."

"Frederic, dear!" said I, leaning confidingly upon the strong arm that never failed me, as we walked up Franklin Street through the rapidly cooling air — "by what devious ways we are led, yet how safely! I was heartbroken less than a year ago because I had to give up my bosom friend. I see her now as she is — vain, vulgar, heartless, fickle, and mercenary. The scales have fallen from my eyes. I tremble to think that I might have sunk to her level — "

A gentle pressure of the hand that lay upon my lover's coat-sleeve checked me.

"That could hardly be," said manly accents. "But I am thankful that you have been spared the suffering which would have followed the awakening from the girlish dream. Wisdom comes with years."

I had been in my fifteenth year for six months, lacking fifteen days!



Chapter XVIII

Jonah's Gourd

"Earth bears no balsam for mistakes;
Men crown the knave, and scourge the tool
That did his will: but Thou, O Lord,
Be merciful to me, a Fool!"

— *Edward Rowland Sill.*

MISS BARBARA'S front door was never locked in the day-time when she was at home. It was not bolted to-day and yielded to my touch. I entered the hall with the freedom of an *habitué* of the house, a liberty I should not think of taking nowadays in my own daughter's house.

"Pull the string and the latch will fly!" and "Come when you like! The latch-string is always on the outside" — were hackneyed proverbs in Old Virginia for so long that the niceties of knocking and ringing for permission to cross the threshold of friend, or neighbor, were neglected. In this respect the former times were not better than these.

I was not guilty, then, of unwarrantable intrusion when I crossed the hall to the front parlor, thinking I heard voices within, and expecting to find my hostess there entertaining a visitor. The room was untenanted, and darkened by shutters and curtains. A space, several inches wide, between the leaves of the folding doors separating the two rooms, let in gleams of firelight from the rear parlor. The talking was in there. With no thought of eavesdropping, I approached the lighted crack. The tableau I beheld through it had the proportions of a panel picture. I withdrew the hand that was about to shove back the door.

A wood fire blazed joyously in the chimney, from which the winter grate had been removed

a week before. Upon the rug stood Major Peachy, with an arm about Miss Marcia's waist. His face was upraised to look into hers, she being the taller of the two, and he was actually in a broad grin! No other word covers the contortion that was more than a smile and not quite a laugh. It was his voice I had heard: —

"You haven't paid me for them yet!" he said, feigning to snatch at a big bunch of roses in her hand.

She held it out of his reach with ease. She had only to stretch her arm above her head. And she, too, was laughing silently, turning her face aside coquettishly. If she had averted it after the manner of the conventional modest maiden, her lips would have been more accessible.

For, that a kiss was the price of the bouquet was patent to my unsophisticated perceptions. I had seen people play at love-making often enough to know the genuine performance at sight. I fled incontinently, and as noiselessly as I had entered. At the outer door of the darkened parlor I heard the price paid — a

"smack" as disgusting to my sensibilities as the Major's grin had been.

I dropped upon the topmost stair of the flight leading to the landing, and sat, shivering and flushing, ready to cry or to laugh, as the scale might turn. A love scene between a man, who, from my point of view, had one foot in the grave in which he was believed to have buried his heart with his wife twenty years agone, and an erudite bean pole like the Phenomenon, was enough to provoke Triphonious to a guffaw. Yet I felt angry, and, in some sort, outraged — personally insulted. I had respected Miss Marcia, had defended and patronized her, had believed in her high ideals and singleness of heart. And here she was doing the "giggle and make giggle" act satirized by her gentle Cowper, as if she had never crossed the *pons asinorum*, or heard of Helicon and Parnassus! Major Peachy was beneath contempt. In my wrath I called him a "*hortus siccus*," and cast a wistful and most un-Presbyterian thought toward honest, unsanctified Tom Garlick and his wrathful double "*d.*" The Phenomenon was an

ungrateful traitor to fair science and to me, who had brought her into Miss Barbara's house. I was responsible for her! The conviction stole like a slender icicle into my soul.

A stealthy movement in the lower hall made me look down. A faint light from the outer twilight stole through the fanlight over the front door. I knew the outlines of Cleopatra's figure as she passed from the rear hall to the front, and into the darkened parlor. She stayed there fully three minutes. Then she came out and struck a match on the floor to light the hall lamp, muttering audibly. Before she could glance upward, I was on my feet and at the door of Miss Barbara's room. Warned by recent misadventures, I tapped on the panel, but so lightly that the sound was lost in a pleasant crooning from within. I pushed the door ajar and listened. A noble fire of logs crackled and roared in the chimney, and filled the room with red light. Miss Barbara leaned back in a rocking-chair in front of it, her feet upon a cushioned stool, singing softly and happily to herself. Words and air were familiar to me

from hearing Cousin Molly Belle sing them at the piano. Miss Barbara's voice was a rich contralto and, mellowed by her mood, harmonized well with the shine and song of the fire. She was crooning the second verse as I pushed the door open: —

> "Then come to me! our theme shall be
> The friends we love, not those we mourn;
> We'll not destroy a present joy
> Lamenting joys that ne'er return.
> The ardent rays of early days
> And youthful bloom we ne'er may see,
> But days of bright and pure delight
> May be in store — then come to me!"

I pulled the door shut and knocked more loudly.

"Come in!" cried her heartsome voice. She raised herself up and glanced over her shoulder at my entrance. "Ah, Mousie! I thought I should see you. Well! here is the old lady tied by the foot, as you see!"

I saw, and was shocked to perceive that her ankle and foot were bandaged, and laid upon the pillow I had mistaken for an ordinary cushion.

She smiled at my exclamation: —

"I managed to tread upon a marble left by a boy on the sidewalk this morning, and tumbled down, turning my ankle as I sprawled. Bob Haxall put it to rights again as far as he could, and sentenced me to my room and a footstool for a week at least. You must run in to see me every day — visit the spinster and the fatherless in her affliction. Take off your hat and shawl, and sit down. There's a chair 'just a-honin'' for you. Don't pity me! I was never more comfortable in all my days. I have such a capital excuse for being as lazy as I know how to be. And look at that fire! Isn't that enough of itself to put one into a good humor with life?"

"Mark Tapley?" laughed I, cuddling close to her.

Her high good humor was contagious. I would say nothing to her of what I had seen downstairs. After all — what business was it of mine? If the Major, at his age, was making a fool of himself and a bigger fool of Miss Marcia, it was only what widowers had done

from time immemorial, and what they would keep on doing to the end of marrying and dying. Remarrying follows naturally upon bereavement when the deceased is bone of one's bone and flesh of one's flesh. Men couldn't be expected to live without bones and flesh. Moreover, it was altogether likely that Miss Barbara was in her brother-in-law's confidence. I had long ago discarded the idea that her devotion to him had anything more romantic in it than passionate loyalty to the memory of the sister who had been as a daughter to a lonely woman without other domestic ties. It was even possible that she would not be averse to a connection which would transfer to other and capable hands the duty of looking after Agnes's husband in his declining years. I would not meddle with the making of the mixed family pie by the touch of a little finger.

"A penny for your thought, Sobersides!"

The fillip upon the cheek I had rested upon the arm of her chair broke up my brown study.

"Something so funny happened to me this evening!" I began, and dashed off into a de-

tailed report of my meeting with the Garlicks and the conclusions I had drawn from this, the finale of my intimacy with my quondam soul-sister.

"'Garlick' is a good old name in King William County," remarked my attentive auditor. "Sidney has done better in taking Tom than her mother did in marrying Ran Parke — a dissipated, good-looking, good-for-nothing fellow, who never earned a pinch of salt in all his days, and left his widow and child to be supported by her kinfolks. Sidney ought to be wearing out the fronts of her wedding-skirts, kneeling down to return thanks every hour of the day that she was snatched, like a brand from the burning, out of the power of that rascally puppy, Len Brooks. — What is it, Cleo?"

The mulatto was waiting respectfully for an available break in the flow of her mistress's volubility. She advanced and dropped a courtesy, her hands folded demurely upon the belt of her clean checked apron.

"I was wishful to know who'll have supper downstairs, and who up hyar, ma'am."

"What's to hinder Miss Molly and Miss Marcia and me from eating ours up here? You don't suppose I'm going to play sick because I can't walk? I think I see myself dieting on toast and tea, and eating off a waiter! Send Antony up to set that table" — designating a stand with falling "leaves" at the back of the room — "and bring up a white woman's supper — not a baby's!"

Cleopatra "dipped" again. I caught a sly gleam from beneath the lids discreetly "down-dropt."

"Ya'as'm! An' Major Peachy! Whar he gwine fer ter eat his'n?"

"Maj' Peachy!" Miss Barbara looked pleased and moved. "Is he here already? You see" — to me — "I wrote to him to-day, telling him that the sprain didn't amount to anything, and saying I would be able to see him for a little while after supper if he could call. I suppose he feels anxious, although I made so light of it. He has just come — I suppose?" she added carelessly to Cleopatra.

"He come mor'n an 'our ago, ma'am."

"And why was I not told? Upon my word,

Cleo, you servants are beginning early to take advantage of my sprained foot!"

Cleopatra was as stolid as the Needle that bears her name.

"Miss Marshy, she been let him in, ma'am. Dey been settin' in th' settin' room alone by deyselves all this time."

A snicker was imperfectly smothered by a fold of the apron caught up as her risibles got the better of her.

Miss Barbara sat upright and haughty. Dangerous lights gleamed in her eyes.

"What do you mean, Cleo? You forget to whom you are talking, and of whom you are speaking!"

With the swift transition from the comic to the tragic, characteristic of the race, the mulatto fell upon her knees and clutched her mistress's hand.

"My dear mistis! my sweet mistis! you may kill me, but I can' hole in no longer! Ef 't hadn' been fo' Antony, I'd 'a' tole you de truth long time ago. Dey's foolin' you — dem two folks downstairs! De very butchers is a-talkin'

of thar cuarr'in's on in market. How he meet her on de way dar eve'y single mornin', and walk with her, and make b'lieve help her buy things for yo' table, and buy flowers fur her to w'ar. *Please* don' be mad with me, my blessed mistis! I been b'long to you all my life, an' I jes' cyan' byar fer ter see you 'posed upon. He come soon dis evenin', 'cause he knowed you was upsta'rs and he could have free co'se and be glorified, ez you may say.

"I done see 'em a-settin' dar befo' de fire, a-kissin', an' his arm 'roun' her waist — *her* what you done pick up outen de streets, ez a person mought say! My sugar-plum-pie mistis! ef you don' b'lieve me, jes' you call 'em bofe up hy'ur, an' I'll tell 'em all I been say to you — an' a heap mo' to dey deceitful faces!"

She was sobbing in the vehemence of the revelation. The outpour would have defied any attempt to check it, and none was made. I stood aghast and dumb; Miss Barbara had fallen back in her chair, shaking in a nervous chill, and as pale as a corpse.

"My God!" she said, in a strained, unnatural

voice, raising her clasped hands high in air. "Have I lived for this? Father of mercies! Is there no pity in earth, or in heaven?"

The chill seized her with redoubled violence. Cleopatra ran for hartshorn and brandy; I covered the frozen hands, now limp and shaking, with my own, and tried to chafe them into warmth. My tears rained upon them with my kisses.

It may have been the feeling of these — it was more probably native resolution — that restored her strength. The muscles contracted under my chafing; I saw her eyes grow steady. When Cleopatra returned with restoratives, her mistress took the bottle of hartshorn from her, and waved away the glass of brandy-and-water.

"That sprain knocked me harder than I thought!" she said, and the voice was her own. "I have not had a nervous spell before for many years. I shall be all right again in a few minutes. Cleo! tell Antony to have supper in the dining room for — *the others* — and bring me up a cup of coffee. What is it, Mousie?" for I was squeezing her hand appealingly.

"Please! please! let me have mine here with you!" I whispered.

She smiled drearily: —

"If you like, Molly! Cleo! Miss Molly Burwell will stay with me. Bring her the nicest supper you can make up. Say to Major Peachy" — tone and look were full of quiet dignity — "that Miss Allen regrets she cannot see him this evening, and that she is much obliged to him for calling to ask how she is. That is all! You may go!"

Silence fell between us two when the servant had gone. I dared not look at my companion, but I laid my head against her knees, my arm thrown across her lap. She sat perfectly still. There was no ground-swell after the storm.

The fire was as jubilant as ever over the destruction of what had been kings of the forest last summer. To my excited fancy it went on with the accompaniment of the song Miss Barbara was singing when I came in. Against my will, I traced the theme in the rhythmic rush up the chimney-throat, and the words formed themselves above it: —

"I will not let one sad regret,
One gloomy doubt, our meeting chill;
But for thy sake I'll try to make
This altered cheek look cheerful still."

"Molly!" Cleo must have been gone all of ten minutes when my name was spoken.

"Yes, Miss Barbara!" I did not look up.

"You know how to hold your tongue. I can trust you not to tattle about what has happened to-night. The fall and the sprain and pain must have thrown my nerves out of plumb. And I am not as young as I used to be. Things make more difference, and I don't bear surprises as well — as when I was younger. Major Peachy — my brother-in-law — has a right to manage his own affairs. He is an honorable gentleman, and if what Cleo told me is true, he means to marry again. I have been thinking it all over while I sat here, mumchance, instead of entertaining the little girl who gives me so much of her time. Many things have come back to me which convince me that Cleo is right. I ought to have seen how it was before this.

"I have a terrible temper!" Her laugh was less successful than her talk. "And what with the pain of my ankle, and the jar to the nervous system, and the prospect of being laid up for weeks with my foot on a chair instead of paddling me to and fro, and going up and down in the earth — it is not wonderful that my temper got away from me when I found that my friends had arranged their little affair without taking me into their confidence. Maybe they were afraid I might not approve. I must coax — or bully them — into telling me all about it — and set their minds at rest.

"When I am strong enough to keep my temper and my tongue inside of my teeth!"

She said it with frequent pauses, but unfalteringly, like one arranging the plan of a campaign. Then there was another long silence. The fire droned and throbbed the accompaniment to *Then, come to me!*

"Do you recollect" — Miss Barbara began again — "what I said last fall about Jonah and the booth he built, and the gourd the Lord caused to grow up in one night? Odd — isn't

it? — how that story sticks in my mind? Hand that Bible to me, please!"

She opened it, and read aloud by the fire-light: —

"*But* GOD *prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.*"

"And if that wasn't enough to punish the poor, blundering, faint-hearted goose who thought himself a prophet," — Miss Barbara lowered the book to say, — "hear what else happened!

"*And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that* GOD *prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah that he fainted, and wished in himself to die and said, 'It is better for me to die than to live.'*

"*And* GOD *said unto Jonah, 'Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?' And he said, 'I do well to be angry, even unto death!'*"

She gave the book back to me and I laid it in its place on a stand just below the portrait of the gallant young officer who had jilted her to marry her sister.

"Somehow, my sympathies were always with Jonah!" commented Miss Barbara. "He was such a blunderbore and got into so many scrapes, and was such a stupid scholar! Yet, three days and three nights in the dark, out of sight of land and sky, ought to have cured him of some of his wrong-headedness. Some people never learn better — even with whales and worms, and hot suns, and blistering east winds for teachers."

"Poor Jonah!" I mused, not thinking of him at all. "No wonder he got angry enough to answer the Lord back!"

Dick was to call for me at half-past seven. Miss Barbara and I had our tête-à-tête supper, a not uncheerful meal in appearance. Miss Marcia had run up to see "how our brave invalid is faring," and to express gratification that I was "with her to win her to temporary forgetfulness of pain." Miss Barbara received her kindly — she was seldom effusively affectionate — and sent her down "to see that the Major was taken care of—" I, unable to emulate her perfect breeding, making believe to look for a

volume in a corner book-case. Neither of us made further mention of the matter which had agitated us earlier in the evening until I was tying my bonnet-strings. Then Miss Barbara remarked, quite in her ordinary tone and manner: —

"I am glad you happened to be here, Molly! But for that I should have made a yet bigger idiot of myself."

"Oh, you couldn't!" I cried, bungling in my haste to controvert her dispraise of herself.

She bowed in mock gratitude.

"Thank you!"

We were still laughing over the luckless reply I meant should be comforting, when Antony knocked at the door.

"A gentleman is waiting with a carriage for Miss Burwell."

"Dick is doing things in fine style!" I said, and kissed my hostess "Good night!"

Passing the back room on tip-toe, I went into the front where my escort awaited me.

Chapter XIX

My Convert

"I am a tainted wether of the flock,
Meetest for death; the weakest kind of fruit
Drops earliest to the ground; and so let me!"
— *Merchant of Venice.*

INSTEAD of Dick Carter, his brother-in-law advanced to meet me, — a personable, well set-up gentleman of whose escort any woman might be proud.

"Cousin Frank!" cried I, in astonishment. "Where did you come from? And where is Dick?"

"At home in bed with an awful headache, a regular out-and-outer! Luckily he had the tickets. So here am I as his unworthy substitute."

He spoke so gayly that I scanned him in suspicion: —

"Something mighty pleasant has happened! I know it from your looks. What is it?"

"It is a mighty pleasant and a mighty unusual happening for an old married man to be allowed to take the nicest girl he knows to a concert of fine music. Try not to look disappointed if you *do* feel so! Allow me!"

He stooped to button my glove with an exaggeration of gallantry.

"That's nonsense, and you know it!" returned I, impatiently. "I'd rather go with you than with forty Dicks or any other boy. But why didn't you bring Cousin Molly Belle? Was Dick so sick that she had to stay with him?"

"He is sound asleep and doesn't need her. But she had no ticket. She sent her love, and you are to listen for her as well as for yourself, and have a royally good time."

Had he been less fond of music, or had the concert been indifferent, his benevolent heart would have been abundantly compensated for all drawbacks by the sight of my undisguised enjoy-

ment. I liked Dick and found him amusing always, but I loved Cousin Frank and admired him so much that the monopoly of his society and attentions for a whole evening transported me to the third heaven of girlish delight. More than one acquaintance glanced smilingly from my radiant face to his, kind, and animated by sympathy in my fulness of happiness. More than once I laughed out low and joyously between the musical numbers. It was transporting to be there and to sit between my very favoritest kinsman and my Frederic! For, although the house was very full, there chanced to be a vacant chair at my right hand, Cousin Frank sitting next to the aisle, and in this I promptly installed my lover. In all that fashionable audience he was the most *distingué* in appearance, and the most appreciative of the music I drank in as a thirsty pilgrim cooling waters. Even then soul, spirit, and sense revelled in the music-bath which, in later years, was to soothe and invigorate mental and nervous forces, times without number. Because music is to me a fount of healing — a spiritual spa — I am never critical of style and

performance, unless the *motif* and the spirit be wanting. To relax the tension of thought, to forget the need of action for one blissful hour, in hearkening to music, as a weary man lays him down in a sun-warmed brook and resigns every sense to the voluptuous enjoyment of the rippling flow of the waves over his tired limbs — this is my regimen for the "nerve-tire" that baffles medical skill.

"I think all the time of —

"'Who, as they sung, would take the prisoned soul
And lap it in Elysium,'"—

whispered I to Cousin Frank as the orchestra concluded Beethoven's *Spirit Waltzes*. "And of —

"'There shall I bathe my weary soul
In seas of heavenly rest.'

"I think that must mean seas of music — 'harpers harping with their harps,' and the 'Hallelujah Chorus.'"

He smiled down indulgently at me. Frederic pressed my hand under cover of a fold of my skirt.

I was entirely and supremely content.

Cousin Molly Belle was waiting for us when we got home. It was almost twelve o'clock, for the programme was long and there were numerous encores. Her dear eyes looked tired, and I exclaimed at the cruelty of keeping her up.

"At my age it matters little," she answered. "You must make up for the loss of beauty sleep by lying in bed in the morning until you are quite ready to get up. Now, you must eat a biscuit and drink a glass of milk, and be off to your room. You can tell me all about the concert to-morrow."

In spite of my happy excitement and the agitating events of the day, I fell asleep as soon as I lay down, and knew nothing until awakened by voices in the hall. I opened my eyes upon broad daylight, but it was still so early that the talking outside my door and the muffled bustle in other parts of the house were unseasonable. I jumped up and opened the door a very little way.

Two men were going downstairs. I could not see them, but I knew Dr. Haxall's voice: —

"He must have been going it *hard* for a long

time! This is the climax of a big spree. He may have tried to pull up too suddenly — poor boy! I'll be in again at nine o'clock."

At the front door he stopped to say: —

"By the way, Mr. Morton, keep your wife out of the room. Such scenes are not fit for a woman's eyes — especially for the eyes of a loving sister. Good morning!"

I groped my way back to bed blindly, and fell upon it — sick all through, and *horribly* frightened!

Dick had broken his pledge to me — sworn upon Marion's ring! He was a *drunkard!* He would break his mother's and his sister's hearts and be a disgrace to us all! This was what his headache had meant!

And I had plumed myself upon the belief that I had reformed him! It was characteristic of my fantastic imagination that the bitter chagrin of the thought was coupled with the story of Whitefield's (or was it Wesley's?) answer to the tipsy fellow who reminded him that he was one of the revivalist's "converts."

"Very likely! you look like a bit of journey-

work! It's plain to be seen the Master had nothing to do with it!"

Then the horror of the truth swallowed every other thought.

I learned the details later. Dick had been brought home, dead-drunk, about sunset of the preceding day. His brother-in-law and the butler had put him to bed, where he lay like a log until three o'clock in the morning. Then he aroused Cousin Frank in the adjoining room by screaming that he was pursued by hobgoblins. Dr. Haxall was summoned, and they had been working over him ever since.

These things I gathered later in the day, as I have said. If I live and recollect until I am a hundred years old, I shall never lose the memory of my frightful awakening on that March morning.

I comprehended everything marvellously well for a child whose knowledge of drunkenness was gained from chance sights upon the public streets, and hearsay stories of negroes who contrived occasionally to get tipsy upon stolen hard cider or peach brandy. What I neither comprehended, nor

appreciated, was the effort the unhappy boy had made to shake off his enemy — the frenzied flight to his sister's home, as a bleeding wild thing seeks the covert in which he was born and reared, as the one haven he can think of when the hunter is at his heels.

I reflected, in an agony of admiration and compassion, upon the pious deceptions practised on me the evening before. I knew, as well as if I had hearkened to their talk, how husband and wife had plotted to give me in full measure the enjoyment I had anticipated. I even divined how nearly Cousin Frank had overdone his part and drawn forth my artless query as to the "mighty pleasant something" which had made him so gay. Running all this over in my mind, my swelling heart melted into tears. I buried my face in the pillow to stifle my sobs lest Mary 'Liza should be awakened and make inconvenient inquiries.

She was already awake. An arm was laid over my shaking form, and a gentle voice asked: —

"What is it, Molly, darling?"

I do not think she ever called me "darling"

in all her life except then. She was a pattern of propriety, and not prone to yield to impulses of any kind. She was the rather inclined to elder-cousinly criticism of the adopted sister whose utter dissimilarity to her exemplary self argued the existence of much that was reprehensible in my make-up. We had never been confidantes. Indeed, I doubt if she ever exchanged heart confidences with any one, even with my mother, who had brought her up from her babyhood. She and I seldom quarrelled now. There was a period when I nearly hated her for always doing the right thing while I was as prone to the wrong as the sparks to fly upward when the fire is stirred. We had outgrown childish feuds; agreed to disagree upon most, if not all non-essential, points, and never to discuss essentials.

The unwonted caress tore down the wall of separation for the time. I forsook the pillow for her shoulder, and sobbed aloud:—

"Dick! Dick! *Dick!*" I wailed. "He's drunk! He has *delirium tremens!* I heard Dr. Haxall talking about it just now!"

She patted my head and stroked back my hair from my forehead.

"There! there! don't cry! Cousin Molly Belle will hear you! And we must pretend not to know!"

Then she told me the particulars of the early stage of the attack as I sketched them just now. The door of our room was open when Cousin Frank and the man-servant supported Dick up the stairs and to his chamber. Mary 'Liza had seen his face and heard him try to talk. Cousin Molly Belle, hearing the disturbance, had run out into the hall. Her husband had bidden her "Go away," and said in so many words — "He is *drunk*, dear! You can do nothing!"

"I shut the door very softly," concluded Mary 'Liza. "Fortunately, there was no light in here, and they did not see me. I was sure they would not wish me to know anything of the dreadful matter. He is her brother, you see. It would be painful for her to discuss his condition with anybody who is not as nearly related to him. So, when she said at the supper-

table that Dick had gone to bed with a sick headache, and that Cousin Frank was going with you to the concert in his place, I behaved as if I had seen nothing. The kindest thing we can do is to act just as usual, no matter how sorry we may be for her and for Dick."

This was magnanimous in Mary 'Liza, for Dick had never disguised his indifference to her, or his decided partiality for my society. I blazed up indignantly: —

"I am not sorry for him one bit! He should be ashamed of himself! He is a disgrace to us all. I wish he would go away and not show himself in Virginia again!"

We were sitting up in bed. Mary 'Liza's hair was banded smoothly under the border of a muslin night-cap embroidered by herself; the ruffles at her throat and wrists still retained traces of the crimping-iron, although she had slept in the cambric gown for two nights. We "changed" on Sundays and Thursdays. My elf-locks had wriggled from under my cap on all sides; my frills were creased and limp. My cheeks were all blubbered with crying; hers

were as fair and smooth as satin-finish, cream-laid writing-paper.

She shook her head wisely. Her senses were as orderly as her apparel. She could lay her hand upon any article in her bureau-drawers at any hour of the night without the help of a candle. Her wits were laid in neat rows, and labelled. She drew them forth now without missing an ethic.

"There must be something in the drinking habit we don't understand, Molly! Something mysterious and terrible. Dick means well. He is kind-hearted. He loves his parents and his sister. *Yet — he — will — drink!* He has everything to lose and nothing to gain by the habit, — his profession, his health, his reputation, his friends. *Yet — he — will — drink!* I cannot comprehend it!"

I have heard scores of temperance lecturers since that time. None of them — not even John B. Gough — put the case more patly and succinctly than the sixteen-year-old schoolgirl stated it. I looked at her with new-born respect. Since I have seen so much more of

the workings of the dread mystery that defied us then, my respect approximates reverence.

We went on with the discussion in whispers while we dressed for the meal at which we must meet our cousins. I was still bitter; Mary 'Liza was still charitable. True, she knew nothing of the vow made upon Marion's heart-ring by the moonlighted window in the upper hall that Christmas night when, to our excited fancy, the doxology sung below-stairs was caught up by listening angels.

"I suppose she is singing it up *there!*" Dick had said, his rapt face uplifted as if listening.

And he had sunk below the level of the beasts that perish!

As we had foreseen, we were told that Dick was very ill — "with something like brain-fever!" said Cousin Molly Belle, with quivering lips.

I stared the eloping Chinese lovers on the willow pattern on my plate out of countenance. Mary 'Liza offered to keep the children quiet in the dining room all the forenoon, that their noise might not reach the sick-chamber. She was

ever helpful in emergencies, and practical in suggestion. I would have made myself into a nursery-maid, or a doormat, for the babies, and cut off a finger to save their mother a pang. Yet it was my demure cousin who thought of the best and kindest thing to say and to do.

When, in the fulness of time, she — as an exemplary parish-worker who carried her thirty-five years placidly and well — wedded a widower preacher with a ready-made family, her world and her church agreed that she had fulfilled her manifest destiny.

Dick Carter lay at the gate of death for ten days. "Alcoholic convulsions," I overheard Dr. Haxall say to a consulting physician before he took him into the room. In the family, at school, and elsewhere abroad, we spoke of it with steady voice and countenance as "brain fever." When he was able to travel, his father and mother took him home in their private carriage. Such good reports of his "convalescence" were received by his sister within the next few months that her eye recovered its lustre, her step its elasticity, her voice had the old-time merry ring.

It was September, and we were at our own home on our vacation, when the news fell like a thunderclap upon his friends that he had gone back to Philadelphia to arrange for resuming his medical studies, had met other students, and had plunged into an orgy that lasted three weeks. When he became sober, he joined an expedition of "filibusters" bound for Cuba.

A blotted, remorseful scrawl to his mother, giving these facts and declaring his intention to clear a stained name by gallant daring, or never to see home and family again, was the last ever heard from, or of, him. He sleeps in a nameless grave.

I have hurried over the closing chapter of a wasted life with scant ceremony. It would be painful and useless to dwell upon the details of the tragedy. Reviewing it, I say calmly what burst from my lips and heart at the news of his fall and flight: —

"Thank God for Marion's death! Had she lived, he would have broken her heart!"

Chapter XX

A Brave Lady

"With silence only as their benediction,
God's angels come;
When in the shadow of a great affliction
The soul sits dumb." —*Whittier.*

THERE was no public examination at the Nunnery at the close of the session in July. All arrangements were made for the most brill-

iant Commencement Richmond had ever seen. The "crack" music scholars had practised selections, instrumental and vocal, for weeks; prize essays were written and conned until the composers were at least letter-perfect. There was not one of us whose commencement-day dress was not finished to the last bow of ribbon. We were to dress in white, with blue and white sashes, and each would have a moss-rose bud stuck in her belt.

Wednesday was to be the great day. A bustle of subdued excitement pervaded the schoolroom on Monday morning. We were all seated at our desks, Bibles open before us, when Mrs. Nunham arose in her place, dignified and gracious. A pretty flush touched her cheeks, her eyes shone benignantly: —

"It is with devout gratitude to an overruling and protecting Power that I invite your attention, before the roll is called, to the circumstance that not one of our number is absent this morning of those who signed their names to our rules and regulations on opening day last October. It behooves us to recognize in this the goodness

that has exempted our band of teachers and pupils from serious disaster, and from death, throughout the session, the auspicious close of which is now so near. One and all should humbly and sincerely bear this blessed exemption in grateful remembrance while we read together a psalm of thanksgiving. Please turn to the One Hundred and Third Psalm. The teachers and pupils will read alternate verses in unison."

Her clear, soft voice began: —

"*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His Holy name!*"

It was very solemn and very sweet. The veriest rattlepate there was serious and apparently devout. Here and there a hand stole up to wipe away a furtive tear; young voices sank under the burden of feeling. The General stood at the head of the room, at the right of his wife's chair, as still as stone, and straight as a bran-new poker. His body-coat was buttoned in very snugly at the waist, and let out very liberally over his chest. His blue-black chin was supported by the military stock; a triangle of white

handkerchief peeped out from a breast pocket; his arms hung straight, his knees were stiff, and his toes turned out. His eyes were fixed upon the wall a foot above the door by which he had entered.

"*But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him and His righteousness unto children's children*," read Madame, her step-daughters, and the "joint children" in their turn.

The school responded: "*To such as keep His covenant and to those that remember His commandments to do them.*"

"PRESENT!"

A voice that was strange to us all rang through the room and drew every eye to the General. He raised one hand to his head, as in salute to a superior officer, then swayed heavily forward.

He was dead before his wife could reach him.

The funeral was on Wednesday in St. Paul's Church, where he had been a regular attendant. We girls wore our graduation-day frocks, with black ribbons instead of the blue and white. At Mrs. Nunham's express request, we walked close

behind the widow and daughters. The hearse was escorted by the Richmond Blues, of which ancient and honorable company the General had been an honorary member. Nothing of pomp and circumstance was lacking from the solemn ceremonial.

"I suppose it is wicked to say it, but I could not help thinking how gratified the General would be if he could see his own funeral," said I to Miss Barbara that evening.

My father and mother had come to town for Commencement, and we were to go home with them on the morrow. This would be my last visit to my friend for two months — perhaps for much longer, for the talk over the supper-table ran upon the probability that the Lady Superior would give up her school now that her husband was dead. She was reported to have said that she felt unequal to the work without his counsel and moral support.

"I reckon a good many other folks sinned in the same direction," rejoined Miss Barbara to my remark. "To my way of thinking, three-quarters of him was Deportment. But I

may be wrong!" — as if seized with compunction for lack of charity to the dead. "I am so often mistaken that the sensation has lost its novelty. There may have been enough inside of the case to excuse the time and labor spent in polishing it."

"There must have been much in him that was excellent and lovable to account for the devotion of the wife and daughters who knew him better than mere acquaintances," observed Miss Marcia.

"Quite so!" assented Major Peachy.

We were having tea in the summer-house. A sultry evening had followed a fervid July day. The long lines of day-lilies bordering the main alley of the garden were too spiritless, or too hot at heart, to close at sunset, as was their duty and their wont. They stretched away into the distance like files of debilitated ghosts, or like nuns at vespers, wearied by the length of their orisons. The river was low, and the evensong of the rapids was a languorous murmur. Scene, atmosphere, talk, and topics were depressing. Miss Marcia and I wore our

white dresses and black ribbons. By general consent, the girls would not lay them off until the morrow. The Major's left sleeve was encircled by a mourning-band. He would wear it for thirty days, for he, too, had once belonged to the "Blues." He was nothing if not conventional.

"The ways of women, like the Lord's, are past finding out," quoth Miss Barbara, presently.

The Major's "Quite so!" usually had the effect of a spring-lock upon whatever topic was under debate. It required an effort afterward to reopen the discussion. The ensuing silence may have been in token of respect for the sapient conclusion of the last speaker. It may have signified discouragement. Miss Barbara violated precedent by continuing the subject: —

"A very wise old lady said to me once — 'If a woman can give a reason for the love that is in her for a man, I wouldn't give a fig for her love.' I believe she was right."

"Oh, Miss Barbara!" ejaculated I, pragmatically; "Love, to be worth having, must be founded upon esteem and congeniality of taste

and sentiment. Love, without this foundation, will not stand wear and tear!"

I blushed consciously, for I was thinking of Frederic. He was present, of course, and his grave, fathomless eyes were upon me.

"Fiddlesticks and the cat's foot!" said Miss Barbara. "You learned that from books, honey, not from everyday life. It's *respect* that goes to pieces in the washing. Love will outlast it by a century, if the woman should be so unfortunate as to live that long. Look at Mrs. Nunham! She fell in love with the General when they were both young, or with what she thought he was. He has been a buckram nonentity for twenty years — for thirty, for all I know! She has kept on believing in him, and she's all broken up when the dummy dies. You couldn't convince her that she has not been leaning upon him all this time, instead of supporting him by the toil of her brain and the sweat of her face. And she has inoculated his daughters with the same faith. They'll go on worshipping him to the end of their days."

Miss Marcia had a pat quotation. While she

recited it, she cast her eyes down and crumbled her bread upon the cloth with her left hand. There was a new ring on it I had not seen until now. I comprehended instantly that she had not worn it to school for fear the girls would torment her with teasing questions. As they certainly would. She was out of school bounds now. Tutors and governors and tyrannical customs might be cast behind her. The dignity of a new estate enveloped her. It might prove an honorable vassalage. To her it was a prospective queendom. She recited primly still, but with an assured air: —

> "'Yes! woman's love 's a holy light,
> That, when once kindled, ne'er can die.
> It lives though cruelty and slight
> To blight its constancy may try.
> Like ivy, where to cling 't is seen,
> It wears an everlasting green.'"

"Quite so!" uttered the Major, emphatically for him. "A very just observation!"

He pushed his chair back and produced his pipe, bowing interrogatively to the hostess.

"Certainly!" said she. "And you'd like to stroll while you smoke, I suppose?"

"Thank you!"

Then he bowed to Miss Marcia, confident, rather than interrogative. In fact he demanded — not entreated. She arose with alacrity, shook out her skirts, and laid her hand within his offered arm. They strolled away down the lilied walk at the farther end of which the purple summer gloaming was beginning to thicken into a curtain. The murmur of Miss Marcia's monologue strayed back to us. I fancied that I detected brief intermissions in the stately continuity of the flow of language, and doubted not that the Major's "Quite so!" chinked these spaces.

More of my misdoing — this match was! But for my officious interference with Marcia Snead's manifest destiny, she would never have been an inmate of the Allen homestead, and never met the man she was going to marry. I had a wild impulse to fall at the feet of my brave lady and pray her to forgive my instrumentality in the ruin of her life-long dream.

Yet — had I really done the grand creature a wrong?

Antony and Cleo began to clear the table. I

waited until they had carried trays and cloth away before saying something from the depths of a heart where the fire burned while I mused:—

"Miss Marcia didn't finish her quotation! There are two more lines in the verse:—

> "'And often, like the ivy, clings
> Most fondly 'round most worthless things.'

It was on the tip of my tongue to ask her why she left that off."

"It is just as well you didn't say it. The tip of the tongue is a slippery sinner, and gets us into mischief oftener than the whole of the rest of the body. She is too happy to hold any commerce with misanthropy. They are to be married in October. I have been helping her to buy her wedding clothes and to have them made up. A house belonging to the Major will be vacant next month. He will have it ready for them by October."

"And you will be left here all alone!" I broke forth impetuously. "Oh, Miss Barbara! this is a hard, cruel, ungrateful, *treacherous* world! I am sick of it!"

She smiled — I thought, mournfully — but there was a quizzical glint in her eye.

"You remind me of what my old Mammy used to say when I talked in the same way. All young people do at some time in their lives. 'De worl' is all right, Miss Barb'ry, honey! But, good Lord! de *people* what's in it!'"

She resumed after a thoughtful pause: —

"Not that I have any right to complain of 'de people what's in it!' We reap as we have sowed, usually. The Almighty lets the land to us on a life-lease. We choose for ourselves what seed we'll put into the ground, and how we'll manage the crop. He doesn't throw in experience, gratis."

"I don't see why not, if He is so gentle and merciful. He can't enjoy seeing us suffer."

"Our doing, and the happiness it brings — our undoing, and the misery that comes from it — are a part of the eternal plan of cause and effect, Mousie. The one and only thing the Lord can't do is to break His own laws. The trouble is with us poor worms of the dust. We don't learn our lesson until we're about ready to be

turned back to dust and ashes. We sow the wind, and then howl and kick because harvesting the whirlwind is such a disagreeable business."

The other two were at our end of the walk again.

"Have you seen the new moon?" cried Miss Marcia, gayly. "It is a thin yellow crescent, and we saw it over our right shoulders! The Major was just speaking of the probability that the superstition had its origin in the worship of Astarte. Her votaries bowed to her upon each return of the moon, and muttered an invocation. It is very interesting to trace —"

They had turned as she spoke, and the rest of the dissertation was lost among the lilies.

Miss Barbara looked after them until the purple veil enveloped and hid them from our sight.

"That is a *good* woman!" she said, seriously. "She will take excellent care of him and be very happy while doing it. He is an honorable gentleman. Any woman's happiness is safe in his hands. I think Agnes will understand!"

The betrothed pair had not emerged from the distant dusks when my father was announced. Antony brought him to the summer-house, and I presented him proudly to our hostess. I held one of his hands, squeezing it hard while he thanked Miss Barbara for her great kindness to his "little girl," and reciprocated her expressed wish for a perpetuation of our intimacy. Then he told her how glad we would be to see her in our own home — "the sooner the better." I put on the bonnet Cleo had brought, and Miss Barbara would accompany us through the hall and to the front porch, where she put both arms about me and kissed me "Good-by," smiling affectionately down into the face I felt was beginning to quiver along lines I strove to keep steadfast.

"Mousie has done me no end of good, first and last!" she said. "At our age, Mr. Burwell, it is much to find somebody who believes in us, through and through. And this is such a stubborn little believer that she starches my self-respect into something like decent shape. God bless and keep you obstinate, dear! You'll suffer

for it, but you'll help other people who need to have a rope thrown out to them!"

She kissed me again, and let me go.

She stands before me always, as I saw her then, — brushing my swimming eyes to behold her clearly — erect and firm between the massive columns of the doorway of her ancestral home. Her strong face, framed by hair that had whitened fast that summer, showed clearly in the afterglow from the West. There were no lights as yet in the grim old house where she was born, and in which she would die. She stood there alone, a lonely evening in prospect — a lonely night, and GOD alone knew how many lonely years, before her.

For I felt in my heart that she would not go back to the garden, where the oddly-matched lovers were lingering between the ranks of phantom lilies, unchaperoned, save by the yellow crescent moon.